



'Kurdish leader seeking asylum in Netherlands'

THE HAGUE (AFP) — Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan is seeking asylum in the Netherlands, the Dutch news agency ANP reported Saturday.

It said Ocalan's German lawyer had officially requested political asylum in the Netherlands for the Kurdish leader on Feb. 10, citing humanitarian grounds.

In a letter to the justice ministry here, lawyer Britta Boehler said Ocalan's life was in danger.

She said the unnamed country in which Ocalan was currently staying had threatened to hand him over to Turkey.

Ocalan, leader of the separatist Kurdish Labour Party (PKK), is wanted in Ankara to face charges of terrorism and murder linked to his group's 14-year armed struggle for a Kurdish homeland in southeastern Turkey.

Ocalan, 49, has been looking for a host country since

he was forced out of his long-term base in Syria in mid-October.

He was arrested in Rome in November by police acting on international warrants but was later released after Italy refused to extradite him to Turkey because he could face the death penalty there.

He left Italy on Jan. 16 for an unknown destination and has since reportedly been turned away from the Netherlands, Switzerland and Greece.

Meanwhile, in Spain, Basque regional parliamentary speaker Juan Maria Atutxa said Saturday his assembly would host a meeting of the Kurdish parliament in exile in July despite opposition from the Spanish government.

Since its establishment in The Hague in 1995, the self-proclaimed Kurdish parliament has convened six times in European countries, sparking harsh criticism from Turkey.

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Ocalan not expected to give himself up in Germany

BONN (R) — The German government dismissed a media report on Friday that fugitive Kurdish guerrilla leader Abdullah Ocalan would soon hand himself over to the German authorities.

"We do not expect him here and there are no indications he should turn up," spokesman Uwe-Karsten Heye told a regular government news conference.

The news magazine Der Spiegel reported that Ocalan planned to turn himself in to Germany, which has an arrest warrant for him on charges of leading a criminal group and for a series of firebombing of Turkish targets in the mid-1990s.

Ocalan, chief of the outlawed Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) and Turkey's most wanted man, has kept the world guessing as to his whereabouts since he was released in Italy in January after two months in custody.

Turkey says it has been hot on the trail of the man it blames for a 14-year war for Kurdish self-rule that has cost more than 29,000 lives.

This has prompted speculation Ocalan might attempt to give himself up in Germany fearing he might otherwise be kidnapped and taken to Turkey where he could face the death penalty.

The guerrilla leader's lawyer, Britta Boehler, said in Amsterdam recently he had tried to enter the Netherlands but was turned back. She said he was hiding outside Europe.

Suspect confesses to forming armed group in Yemen

ADEN (AP) — The son of an Islamist leader confessed in court Saturday to forming an armed group in Yemen but denied charges of weapons possession.

The prosecution had charged that Mohammad Mustapha Kamel, a Briton, was found in possession of grenades and firearms when he was arrested.

Kamel is the son of Abu Hamza Al Masry, an Islamist leader. Yemen is seeking Al Masry's extradition from Britain.

In addition to Kamel, Shaz Nabi, Ayad Hussein and Ali Mohsen were brought to trial for the first time since they were arrested in January.

They joined six other Westerners being tried on charges of associating with armed groups, plotting murder and destruction, and possessing weapons.

It was the first time that all 10 men have been in court at the same time.

Nabi and Hussein, both Britons, and Mohsen, an Algerian with a French passport who lives in Britain, have denied the charges.

The other six on trial are Britons Mohsin Ghulaih, 18, Malik Nasser Harha, 26, Ghulam Hussein, 25, Shahid Butt, 33, and

Samad Ahmad, 21, and Frenchman James Luuves, 30.

All six have pleaded not guilty to the charges.

The four new suspects appeared healthy but tired as they were brought into the courtroom in the southern Yemeni city of Aden amid tight security.

The hearing was attended by British Consul David Pearce and defendants' families, journalists, diplomats and lawyers.

The defendants have been linked to Islamic radicals who kidnapped 16 Westerners in December, four of whom died in a shootout when Yemeni security forces sought to rescue the hostages.

The trial was adjourned until Tuesday to give the defense team of the four new suspects more time to review the case.

Unlike the two previous sessions, when defendants exchanged insults with security forces and shouted claims of torture, Saturday's hearing was relatively calm.

More than 300 policemen armed with AK-47s surrounded the three-storey courthouse.

Turkey evaluates Iraq policy prior to Aziz visit

ANKARA (AFP) — Turkey's senior government officials and diplomats on Saturday evaluated Ankara's policy on Iraq prior to Monday's visit by Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz.

"We made a general evaluation of the current situation," Turkish Foreign Minister Ismail Cem told reporters after the meeting, without elaborating.

According to unconfirmed reports, the meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit, focused on updating a plan he prepared in 1996 for stability and peace in the region.

The plan includes reassuring Baghdad about its territorial integrity, lifting the trade embargo if Iraq complies with U.N. resolutions, and helping to start a dialogue between Baghdad and Kurdish groups in northern Iraq.

Ecevit has said in the past week that Turkey would make "constructive proposals" on the Iraqi crisis in the meeting with Aziz.

Aziz said in an interview published in a Turkish daily newspaper Friday that his talks in Ankara would touch upon the permission given by Turkey to U.S. planes to launch air strikes against Iraq from their base at Incirlik in southern Anatolia.

Planes taking off from Incirlik have clashed with Iraqi air defences several times during patrol flights in the northern no-fly zone since the four-day joint U.S.-

British air strikes against Baghdad in December.

"The use of Incirlik air base by American planes to bomb Iraq is a blemish on Iraqi-Turkish relations. We must eliminate this blemish," Aziz told the daily *Turkiye*.

In response, Cem on Friday pointed out Turkey's obligation with regards to the Incirlik air base. "[The use of the air base at] Incirlik and Operation Northern Watch have been decided by the Turkish parliament," he said.

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Ecevit has further criticised the U.S. of having a "vague" policy on Iraq and called for closer consultations between Washington and Ankara to resolve the issue.

Aziz's visit, meanwhile, has led to unease on the part of Washington, Ankara's chief ally. "I have to say that we don't understand Prime Minister Ecevit's decision to host Tareq Aziz at this time," State Department spokesman James Foley told reporters Thursday.

Turkey, which supported the U.S. in the 1991 Gulf War, has called on its southern neighbour several times to comply with U.N. resolutions as the means of integrating Baghdad with the international community.

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Although a new course is not likely to be charted by old faces, "the King might not want to accept the government's resignation until he has completely made up his mind on the new faces he intends to bring up and, most importantly, on the changes he intends to introduce," the observer said.

Summarising the swing of speculation, one former premier stated that "the question is not whether there will be a new government, but when."

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Hamas supporters occupy police station

JERICHO (AFP) — Hundreds of Palestinians brandishing the green flag of the Hamas Islamic Resistance Movement Friday occupied police headquarters here demanding the release of Islamists who have gone on hunger strike.

The protesters, numbering around 600, forced their way into the building, at times trading blows with the Palestinian police officers.

No shots were fired and they were asked to peacefully leave the police station.

They said they wanted to stage a show of support for the five Palestinian Islamists imprisoned at Jericho who have been on hunger strike for the last two weeks. Four of the prisoners are members of Hamas and the fifth belongs to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Islamists at Nablus have also gone on hunger strike to try and force their release and some 1,000 Palestinians demonstrated Friday in a show of support for them.

The prisoners are protesting their detention without trial or charges by the Palestinian National Authority (PNA).

The PNA has pledged to crack down on the armed wing of Hamas and other groups opposed to peace accords with Israel as part of the U.S.-brokered Wye River land-for-security deal signed in October.



CELEBRATORY CAKE FOR ASSAD: This huge cake was made to celebrate the reelection of Syrian President Assad for a new term in Damascus on Saturday. The cake weighs 950 kgs, 4.60 metres in height, the base 2x2 metres while the upper base was 120x120 cms. At the top is a special statue of the head of Assad surrounded by angels (AP photo)

Speculation on fate of Tarawneh government starts in earnest

(Continued from page 1)

"If there is a new government and a good understanding of the future, these [the elections and press laws] are expected to be reviewed," Obeidat said.

The proclamation on Feb. 7 of King Abdullah, 37, has sparked many hopes in a country where, according to the Department of Statistics, more than 83 per cent of the 4.6 million population are below the age of 40.

"The era of the Fourth Kingdom has begun," said an observer close to the leadership. "People expect a comprehensive, total change, not just a cosmetic operation."

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Immediately after the change in the line of succession on Jan. 26, King Hussein left to the U.S. suffering a relapse of the

lymphoma to which he succumbed 11 days later.

Speculation about Tarawneh's readiness to tender his resignation was never denied, and in a live interview with the London-based MBC Television on Friday, the premier seemed to confirm the thesis that his team is on stand-by awaiting the King's signature.

"I have not submitted my resignation, but I am ready at any time to obey any directives from the King," he said.

Tarawneh, who took office on Aug. 20, 1998, is heading the Kingdom's 84th government since 1921.

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

PRAYER TIMES

The English-Language Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190 Evangelical Free Church Tel. 4892679 The Baptist Church Tel. 4628052 The Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 4771331 The American Orthodox Church Tel. 4775261

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church Sweifieh, Tel. 5920740 Assemblies of God Church Tel. 4632785

St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590 Terra Sancta Church Tel. 4622366 Anglican Church Tel. 4624853/4624811

St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox Church Tel. 4771751

Amman International Church Tel. 5865897

German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 5688404

The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 5811295

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tel. 4654932

St. John the Baptist at De la Salle College Tel. 5661757

Church of the Annunciation Tel. 4637440

Greek Orthodox Church Tel. 464138

Church of Presentation, Sweifieh Tel. 5920146

The Unite Catholic Church Tel. 4634757

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

Moderate weather conditions will prevail during the day becoming cool at night and winds easterly moderate. In Aqaba, winds will be northerly moderate and seas calm.

Amman 05/17

Agaba 12/23

Deserts 04/19

Jordan Valley 10/23

Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 17, Aqaba 22. Humidity readings: Amman 24 per cent, Aqaba 25 per cent.

Following are the temperatures expected today in the following areas:

Ajloun 03/15

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:

Dr. Yusef Rashid 4575792

Dr. Jum'a Abu Dhabib 4758848

Dr. Khalil Jabbal 4784450

Dr. Walid Al Masri 5675485

AMMAN:

Firas Pharmacy 5661912

Al Salam Pharmacy 4636730

Mayadah Pharmacy 5537004

Rukn Al Dawa Pharmacy 5336169

IRBID:

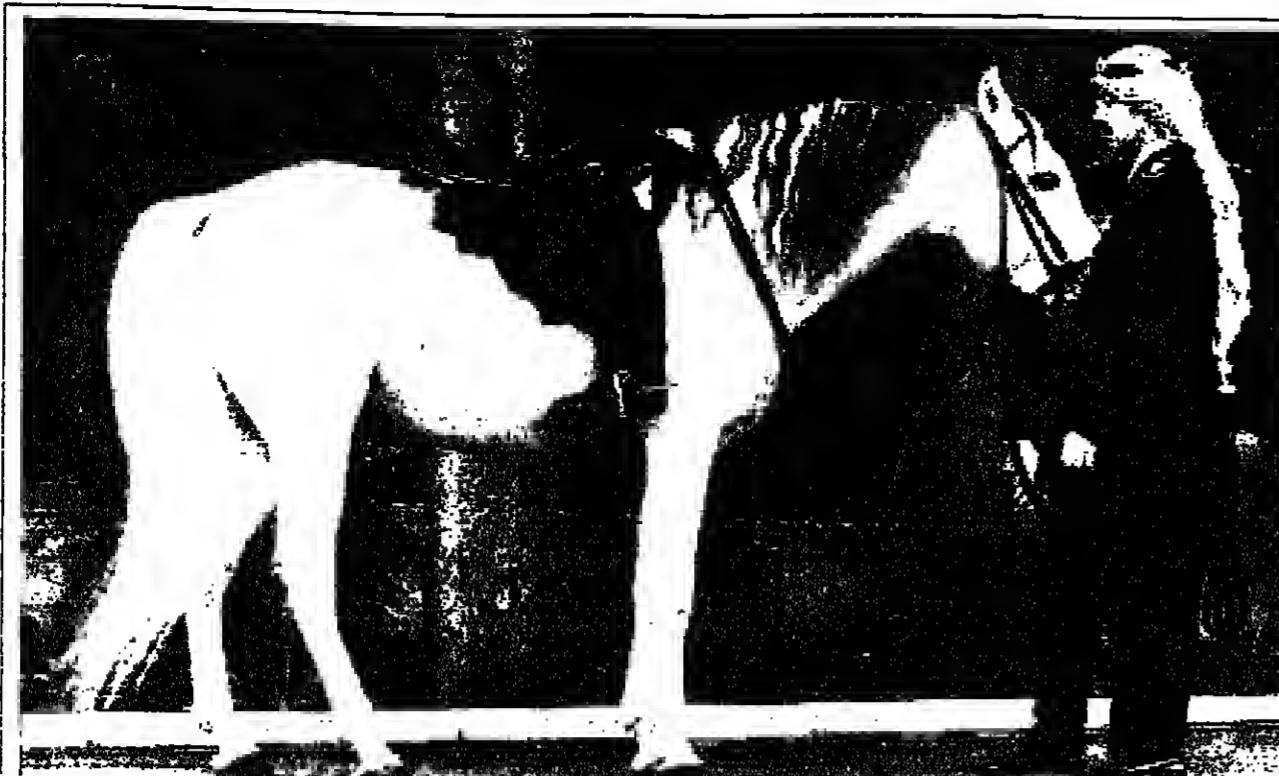
Dr. Issam Al Salhi 021246583

Fou'ad Pharmacy 021275360

ZARQA:

Dr. Walid

Hamas
supporters
occupy
police
station



Amru draws wonder from King Hussein's admirers

By Dana Charkasi

AMMAN — The Arabian horse, that earliest improved breed of horse, is valued by equestrians in the world over for its speed, stamina, beauty and intelligence.

The Arabian breed was first mentioned in 400 BC and is said to have stemmed from five mares given to the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) by his followers.

While the world was transfixed by the funeral cortège of His Majesty King Hussein on Monday, a riderless white stallion, which was led into the procession, drew wonder.

Amru, as this stallion is called, was King Hussein's favourite horse.

Foaled in the Royal Hashemite Stables in 1984, Amru comes from the Kehilan Krush, one of the seven Arabian horse breeds of the Ara-

bian peninsula.

He was prepared for the funeral festivities by two of King Hussein's daughters, both equestrians themselves — Their Royal Highnesses Princess Haya and Princess Eman.

With black riding boots placed backwards in the stirrups, a British tradition symbolising the passing away of a leader, the stallion followed the gun carriage upon which King Hussein's coffin

rested all the way to the grave site where the late King was laid to rest last Monday.

In keeping with that same tradition, Amru was not returned to his own stable — the stallion is now kept at the Jafar Stables of HRH Princess Zein Bint Al Hussein.

Nearing the King's final resting place, Amru reared up on his hind legs, as if in a final salute to his master.

Jordanians call at Royal Court

AMMAN (Petra) — Jordanians called at the Royal Court Saturday to sign a special register expressing their condolences on the death of King Hussein, who died last Sunday.

Visitors who came to the Royal Court to sign the register pledged allegiance to King Abdullah Ben Hussein and the Hashemite Throne.

The register will be available to the public from 10 a.m. until 12 noon daily from Feb. 13 to March 18.

The Federation of Jordanian Labour Unions Saturday issued a statement expressing Jordanian labourers' deep grief on the passing of King Hussein.

"King Hussein has left us a

legacy of great achievements and had supported Jordanian labourers, whom he considered nation's backbone in view of their role in construction and development. He forged legislation on the social security system to ensure labourers' security and played an active role in organising the relationship between employees and employers," said the statement.

The federation said Jordanian labourers pledge to honour the King and his legacy by protecting the country's achievements and vow to double their production efforts to further the country's progress and prosperity.

The federation pledged to support King Abdullah and

Crown Prince Hamzah in their march.

Bishop Samir Qafeeti, head

of the Episcopal Evangelical

Church in Jordan and Palesti-

ne, also sent a cable of sym-

pathy to King Abdullah and

Prince Hamzah Saturday.

Chairman of the Federation of Jordanian Chambers of Commerce Haidar Murad sent a cable to Crown Prince Hamzah expressing sympathy over the passing of King Hussein and pledging allegiance to the Hashemite Throne.

"We renew our loyalty to the Throne as we forge ahead behind the Hashemite leadership towards the attainment of further progress and prosperity for Jordan," said Murad.

Prince Hamzah also

received a congratulatory

cable from Chinese Deputy

President Hu Tao in which he

wished him further success.

His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hamzah on Saturday received a cable from French President Jacques Chirac in which he expressed his condolences on the passing of King Hussein. He said King Hussein was a close friend which he lost and that the King will be always remembered for his endeavours to attain peace.

President Chirac voiced his country's support to Jordan and expressed his congratulations to Prince Hamzah on his appointment as Crown Prince.

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attain peace.

Participants began the procession by

reading the Fatiha — the first surah

(verse) of the Koran — for the soul of

His Majesty King Hussein.

Ahmad Awaishah, a university

teacher at the Sharia college, eulogised

the King's achievements in building a

prosperous country in the face of many

challenges, and talked about his charis-

ma.

"He was our great teacher and father

at the same time," said Awaishah.

Yousef Ali, the director of the Islamic

and Cultural Centre, told the gathering

that under King Hussein's rule, Jordan

became a well-known country, seeking

peace in the world.

Ali asked students to pray for him and

to ask God "to give our great King Hus-

sein a place in paradise. He was not just

a king, he was a friend and father for all

the Kingdom's people. He worked hard

all of his life to ensure a safe life for all

Jordanians and Arabs."

Student Zaid Shraideh said, "A great

number of people gathered today in this

solemn ceremony. All of us are very sad

to lose the King. He was our teacher. All

students and university employees par-

ticipated and expressed their sad feel-

ings, which show our true love for His

Majesty."

"Even students in opposition parties

and foreigners at the university par-

ticipated today in the solemn ceremony,

marking the great sadness obvious

throughout the university," said student

Qutaibah Qudah.

The group carried black flags, pic-

tures of King Hussein and many plac-

ards during the procession.

Some read, "We Will Never Forget

You King Hussein" or "All Genera-

tions Will Remember You."

All pledged support for and allegiance

to His Majesty King Abdullah.

Abu Nimah lectures American students at conference in honour of King Hussein

NEW HAVEN, Connecticut (AP) — King Abdullah, will carry on his father's efforts to bring about peace in the Middle East, Jordan's ambassador to the United Nations told American students at a conference honouring the late monarch.

King Hussein laid the groundwork for his eldest son to make a smooth transition into power. Ambassador Hasan Abu Nimah said Friday. Saying it would be "practically impossible" to shake Jordan's strength in the region, Abu Nimah said Jordan's government will remain stable despite shift-

ing political forces in the Middle East following the King's death.

"The institutions he built in Jordan, the principles he set, the noble goals he set in his life for serving are still alive," he said. "His son ... will carry the banner with the same confidence and strength and the march toward building peace will continue."

Abu Nimah's comments on the change in power came in a speech to about 75 college students at a mock Middle East peace summit at Yale University.

The organisers of the event saluted King Hussein, who died Sunday

from cancer at age 63, with a moment of silence. In the conference programme, they included tribute that noted Hussein's efforts to bring peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

College students from across the country attended the conference, which was designed as a learning experience for those interested in international diplomacy. During the simulated summit, students were assigned to represent differing political interests in the Middle East.

They negotiated on human rights issues, regional security and terrorism, economics and

trade, Jerusalem and holy

sites, Palestinian statehood and refugees, in an effort to

reach a peace accord.

Joseph Miller, 23, a senior from the University of Maryland, is an American Jew, but he represented the Palestinian Authority at the conference.

"It's more of a role-playing exercise than actual practical experience," he said. "As American Jews, we feel strongly in a certain way, but we've never felt personal danger, so we don't have an emotional stake in it the way Israeli Jews do."

depleted uranium from the

bombings during the second

Gulf War in 1991.

The infant mortality rate for under-fives has increased 16-fold during the eight-year-old sanctions, health ministry officials say.

The Saddam Hussein Hospital, once pristine, is a shadow of its former reputation as the leading hospital in Iraq. Each room accommodates as many as eight children, who are delivered from even the most remote areas of Iraq for cancer treatment. As necessary medications are unavailable, these children almost inevitably succumb to the killer-disease.

According to the Iraqi Ministry of Health an average of 6,000 children below five years of age die in Iraq every month because of the lack of medicine, vaccines, malnutrition and cancer, now the number one child-killer.

Doctors say they have noted a definite increase in the number of leukaemia cases among Iraqi children — cancer they say is caused

by chemical warfare and

radiation from the

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The bombing and economic sanctions are a crime that cry to heaven," said Deborah Swinger, a Bruderhof member.

"We want to extend the hand of peace and love to the people of Iraq," said Swinger.

Swinger said that for the

children of Iraq each passing

day is vital. According to the

team, the hospital's only

chance to fight off death from

these suffering children is to

administer blood transfusions.

"We saw mothers standing in constant vigil over their dying children," Swinger said.

Prior to the sanctions, medicine was free at the Saddam Hussein Hospital. Now, due to its scarcity, parents have to pay for it.

Many Iraqis sell part of

their food rations to pay their

children's hospital bills.

The average monthly wage of a civil servant in Iraq is worth \$5 as a result of the collapse in the local currency under

sanctions.

"Economic sanctions

should not be used as a political

weapon against a country

and its people," said Swinger upon her return from Iraq.

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"We saw mothers standing in

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dying children," Swinger said.

"We noticed the incredible

faith and tolerance these people had

Bhutto urges Indo-Pakistan peace

ISLAMABAD (AFP) — Pakistan's main opposition leader Benazir Bhutto Saturday called on leaders of India and Pakistan to make peace and declare South Asia a region free from nuclear weapons and missiles.

Addressing a conference of parliamentarians from the two countries, Bhutto urged India and Pakistan to "adhere quickly" to the global nuclear Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) "jointly or singly."

They should also agree to a moratorium on fissile material production, resist development, flight testing and storage of ballistic weapons and strengthen export controls on nuclear technology, she said.

"Engage in dialogue not only to talk but to make peace," Bhutto told some 100 MPs, including 37 from India, on the last day of the two-day meeting, which precedes a visit to Pakistan by Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpeyi.

Vajpeyi is due to Lahore on Feb. 20 on the inaugural run of a cross-border bus service for wide-ranging talks with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

Bhutto warned of grave economic consequences if the two nations failed to break away from their 50-year rivalry.

Despite "nuclear bravado" the two "need to face the reality that we are economic pygmies on the world stage, and have a population base of 1.3 billion of the world's poorest people, with the worst standard of living," she said.

"If we close our borders and live in the past, our region risks suffering a fate similar to the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and other such countries.

"Both of our nations must step forward, understanding the threat to our people, our region, and the entire world, and declare South Asia a nuclear free and mis-

sile free zone," the opposition leader said.

Bhutto said she would admit she followed a "path of hawkishness" during her two terms as prime minister in 1988-90 and 1993-96, but added "that was before India and Pakistan shook the world with their nuclear blasts."

Echoing the position of the government, she stressed the need to tackle and resolve the dispute over Kashmir, the Himalayan region divided between Pakistan and India and claimed by both.

"All of our problems, all of our disputes, all of our disagreements can be resolved quickly to mutual satisfaction if we address the question of Jammu and Kashmir.

"The issue... is a problem that has brought us to war before and could very well bring us to war again, this time with the most catastrophic consequences," she said.

She dismissed opposition to "compromise" by extremists in both countries.

"The stakes, my friends, are much too high to let our policy be driven by our political margins. It is time that our policy be driven by reason, and by our commitment to our children's future."

She said a resolution of the issue must take into account political desires of the people of the strife-stricken former princely state.

Bhutto called for a "dramatic reduction of the nearly 600,000 (Indian) troops now stationed in Kashmir, ceasing "all forms of torture, intimidation and extra-judicial killings" and opening Kashmir to international human rights monitors.

She promised to "vigorously pursue" in Pakistan a dialogue with India for open borders between two parts of Kashmir and talks for mutual arms reduction and redeployment of forces.



Police use batons to break up a protest march by Communists demonstrating in New Delhi against the killing of 11 landless farmers by an outlawed militia in the eastern state of Bihar. The Bihar state government was sacked by New Delhi over the massacre. (AFP photo)

Indian opposition, media divided over sacking of state government

NEW DELHI (AFP) — India's centre-left political groups Saturday broke ranks with the main opposition party to fay the Hindu nationalists for sacking a provincial government after a massacre of landless farmers.

Half-a-dozen opposition parties accused Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpeyi of bias after his cabinet dismissed Friday the local government in the crime-prone eastern state of Bihar.

The decision came a day after an outlawed militia of rich landowners shot dead 11 poor villagers at an isolated hamlet for alleged links with Maoist guerrillas, and vowed to carry out further killings.

Indian President K.R. Narayanan, who in September had resisted an earlier attempt to sack the Bihar government, signed an order late Friday sacking the 18-month-old state administration.

Communist leader Jyoti Basu, chief minister of the neighbouring state of West Bengal, described the federal government move as "repre-

hensible" and called for nationwide protests.

Former prime minister Chandra Shekhar warned the Bihar government's ouster could "trigger sharp reactions in the state which would be painful and unfortunate."

The summering poor-rich divide has turned Bihar into a killing field, with private armies of landlords repeatedly massacring defenceless villagers sympathetic to the Maoists.

Bihari Chief Minister Rabindra Devi, an illiterate mother of nine, called her sacking an assault of democracy and accused the Hindu nationalists of violating constitutional norms.

She received quick support from the rest of India's centre-left opposition, some of which denounced the sacking although they are opposed to Rabindra Devi's scandal-hit administration.

A fierce foe of Hindu nationalists, Laloo Prasad said Thursday's murder of 11 poor villagers was masterminded by his rivals to prepare the ground for the government's dismissal.

But the main opposition Congress party, led by Italian-born Sonia Gandhi, reacted differently, saying Rabindra Devi had lost the right to rule Bihar for failing to prevent a series of massacres.

"There was no other alternative," Congress general secre-

tary Sushil Kumar said here. "Law and order (in the state) was totally out of control."

Federal Information and Broadcasting Minister Pramod Mahajan, a Hindu nationalist, justified the government decision, saying Bihar had become a haven for criminals.

He said since Laloo Prasad became chief minister in 1990, Bihar had witnessed "5,000 murders, 3,000 attacks by bandits, 1,000 rapes and 2,500 kidnappings on an average every year."

The Indian media welcomed Rabindra Devi's ouster.

"After the latest carnage, few people will doubt that the (Bihar) government had lost its right to rule," The Hindu Times said, calling the sacking "inevitable."

"Good riddance," said The Indian Express, while The Hindu said Bihar's rulers had abdicated their moral authority.

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — China's top negotiator could put off a plan to visit Taiwan amid escalating diplomatic and military disputes between the two rivals, a politician said Saturday.

Lawmaker Feng Hu-Hsiang said Wang Daohan also might not make the visit in May, as Taiwan has hoped, because Taipei has refused to discuss with him how to proceed with political talks with China.

"Mr. Wang would not visit in May and might not even come anytime this year," Feng told reporters one day after he returned from Beijing where he met Wang's deputy Tang Shuei.

Feng's tiny New Party favours reunification with China.

Wang, head of the semi-official Association for Relations across the Taiwan Straits, was to return a visit his counter-

part, Koo Chen-fu, made to China in October.

Also Saturday, the Chinese negotiating body wrote its counterpart, the Straits Exchange Foundation, that it would send a deputy to Taiwan in March to discuss Wang's visit.

But the visit has become a thorny question as China has requested to arrange for Wang and Koo to discuss future political talks, which Taiwan has rejected.

Feng said Taiwan's plan to participate in a U.S.-sponsored regional missile defence system has angered Chinese leaders.

"They view this as a severe provocation," Feng said. He quoted Tang as saying Taiwan and China should hold talks to end their hostilities rather than let foreign countries meddle in their internal affairs.

Taiwanese military officials

say they are studying joining the system known as Theatre Missile Defence, because China has deployed ballistic missiles targeting the island.

China was also outraged as Taiwan set up diplomatic ties with Macedonia, forcing Beijing to sever ties with the former Yugoslav republic, Feng said.

Beijing considers Taiwan to be a renegade province that eventually must be united with the mainland, by force if necessary.

Taiwan hopes Wang's visit could lead to resumption of dialogue that China froze in 1995 in anger over what it saw as a covert Taiwanese effort to strive for independence.

While China wants to move on to political issues, Taiwan wants to continue talks about less sensitive, mundane issues to nurture trust needed for the political talks.

They are very concerned and are questioning the ability of the court to interpret the actions of the NPC Standing Committee.

"They think this is against the constitution and the Basic Law and that this mistake has to be corrected," she added.

Last month's ruling by Hong Kong's Court of Final Appeal gave the right of abode to mainland children born to Hong Kong permanent residents irrespective of whether the parents were married or had residents' status at the time of their children's birth.

It angered mainland legal experts and officials who said the court had overstepped its powers by casting aside legislation made by the NPC.

Leung said that since Hong Kong's mini-constitution, the Basic Law, has only been in place for 20

years, it is not surprising that we run into problems."

She added the performance of the Hong Kong government has shown that it has the ability to handle this.

"We don't have to worry," she said.

Zhen Zuoer, deputy director of the Hong Kong and Macau Office, echoed Leung's statement saying "this is a 'one-China policy' problem."

"Ms. Leung has told you her impression and what she got from this Beijing trip. She had a very good and harmonious discussion," said Zhen who accompanied Leung to speak with reporters.

Leung arrived in Beijing on Friday and met with the Chinese legal advisers who had criticised the ruling.

On Saturday, she met officials of the State Council (cabinet) Hong Kong and Macau Office before returning to Hong Kong.

Since Hong Kong reverted to Chinese rule in 1997 around 43,000 mainland

NEWS IN BRIEF

Blair under pressure to declare genetically modified food safe

LONDON (AFP) — Britain's retailers demanded action from Prime Minister Tony Blair Saturday, accusing his government of sending out confusing signals and failing to allay consumers' fears over genetically modified food. Some of Britain's biggest retailers have written to Agriculture Secretary Nick Brown calling for a clear statement from the government that genetically modified (GM) foods are safe to eat. The move comes after the government Friday resisted pressure to follow other European countries in declaring a moratorium on the commercial exploitation of GM foods. Ann Grabin, of the British Retail Consortium, told the BBC Saturday: "The government is now sending out confusing signals to consumers and not allaying consumers' fears. They need to tell the country these products are approved as safe and that they stand by that decision."

French police seize record amount of cocaine

PARIS (AP) — French police have seized a record amount of cocaine — 1.2 metric tonnes — in a raid in a suburb south of Paris, police officials said Saturday. Police initially found 400 kilogrammes of cocaine in a truck during Friday's raid and soon after discovered the rest in a nearby warehouse. Police estimated the street value of the drugs seized at more than one billion francs (about \$180 million). The amount of cocaine seized in Friday's raid surpasses the total found in all of 1998, police said. Seven people, who were not identified but were said to be part of a travelling carnival, were arrested in the raid.

Indonesia seeks permission to chase rebels into neighbour territory

JAKARTA (AFP) — Indonesia wants permission to chase separatist rebels in the easternmost province of Irian Jaya who take refuge over the border in neighbouring Papua New Guinea (PNG), an official was quoted as saying Saturday. "If the government of PNG allows Indonesia's security agencies to enter the territory of PNG and cooperation with the PNG security apparatus can be established, the scope of movement for the guerrillas will be narrowed," Irian Jaya provincial government spokesman Suryanto Suryadiwiyono told the Antara news agency. He said Jakarta had submitted a request to Port Moresby to launch cross-border military operations but had yet to receive a response, adding the issue was "an agenda priority" for the Indonesian government. Irian Jaya's Free Papua Movement has been fighting for an independent West Papua state in the former Dutch colony of Western New Guinea since it became an Indonesian province in 1963. The United Nations gave its recognition to Indonesia's sovereignty there in 1969. Last month Indonesian President B.J. Habibie said he would travel to Irian Jaya to meet local representatives but no date has been fixed for the visit. The provincial government stressed the visit would be dedicated to economic development and would not address local calls for independence or autonomy. Two weeks ago Jakarta in a surprise move offered independence to the former Portuguese colony of East Timor, similarly beset by separatist violence, if an offer of autonomy is turned down.

KLA frees 8 ethnic Albanians

PRISTINA, Yugoslavia (AP) — The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) has released eight ethnic Albanians held on suspicion of collaborating with Serbs, a spokesman for international peace monitors said Saturday. The eight, detained after a mass funeral for victims of the Racak killings, were freed late Friday night, said Jorgen Grunnet, spokesman for the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The detentions reflected high tension surrounding Thursday's funeral and continuing friction between ethnic Albanian rebels and others Kosovar Albanians deemed loyal to Serb authorities in the separatist province of Serbia. "The reason for their detention was to ensure security at the funeral," said Kosovo Press, the KLA's news agency. "The eight were suspected of working for the Serb police." Two of those detained are in the Serb police reserves, it said. There were no immediate reports of new clashes in the province Saturday — the one-week mark of Kosovo peace talks in Rambouillet, France. Friday, in the first reported clash since peace talks opened, the Serbian Media Centre said a guerrilla was killed and two policemen wounded after the rebels fired on a police patrol near Glogovac in central Kosovo. There was no confirmation from the OSCE, which has monitored an unofficial cease-fire in effect since October.

Janet Jackson separates from longtime boyfriend

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Janet Jackson's musical question, "What have you done for me lately?" may have split her hit home: she and her longtime romantic interest have split up. The 32-year-old singer and Rene Elizondo Jr. have separated, according to a statement released Friday by the pop diva's publicist, Lindsay Scott Management. The couple, who had a "personal relationship" for 13 years, planned to continue their friendship, the statement said. Ms. Jackson, the youngest daughter of the celebrated musical family that also produced pop mega-star Michael Jackson, was married to singer James DeBarge for about a year when she was in her late teens. Shortly after her divorce, she and Elizondo began dating.

2 dissidents detained in central China

BEIJING (AP) — Two dissidents linked to a banned opposition political party were detained by police Saturday in the central Chinese city of Wuhan, a human rights group reported. Chen Zhonghe, chairman of the Hubei province branch of the China Democracy Party, was taken away by two police Saturday afternoon. Xiao Shichang, secretary general of the party's Hubei branch, was working in his small shop when three police officers detained him, the Information Center of Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China said. Family members said the two men had not returned home by Saturday evening. The Hong Kong-based group said both men had been preparing for two meetings by dissident groups Saturday afternoon. Xiao Shichang, Hubei's provincial capital, China's communists rulers launched a crackdown on the China Democracy Party more than two months ago. Six party members have been jailed, the three most influential leaders to crack down, announcing the formation of new party branches and making plans for gatherings despite police warnings.

World

Heavy sn

Judge in

over gove



A Sofia resident braves the freezing temperatures as she walks through heavy snow with her dog, after a snowstorm hit the Bulgarian capital and the rest of the western part of the country (AFP photo)

Heavy snow sweeps central Europe

VIENNA (AFP) — Heavy snow overnight blocked roads across central Europe, disrupting traffic and cutting off towns and villages.

In Hungary, hundreds of vehicles were stranded after snow blocked the main north-east highways.

More than 50 roads were impassable in the region, leaving more than 200 towns and villages cut off, the MTI agency reported.

Border crossings at Lonya and Barabas, at the Ukraine

frontier, were closed by the snow, along with a major route into Slovenia, MTI said.

Forecasters predicted more snow Saturday.

Friday, Hungarian police said six people had died in the cold snap sweeping central Europe since Wednesday.

Around 300 troops have been drafted in to help with snow-clearing and rescue efforts.

Traffic was also disrupted

on all major roads in the east of neighbouring Austria Saturday.

Long queues developed at the Austria-Hungary border and certain cross-border routes, including at Deutschkreuz, were closed to heavy vehicles, officials said.

Further south in Bulgaria, the snow also disrupted traffic and cut electricity to around 166 towns and villages, the BTA agency reported.

Some 20 villages were also without water, while 17 were without telephones after snow brought down lines.

The Black Sea port of Burgas was closed by strong winds Saturday and the snow disrupted flights to and from Sofia airport.

Meanwhile in France, long traffic queues were reported between Lyon and the Alps Saturday as thousands of holidaymakers headed for ski resorts.

Two battle for Nigeria's main party's presidential ticket

JOS, Nigeria (AFP) — Former military ruler Olusegun Obasanjo arrived Saturday in the town of Jos for the convention of Nigeria's largest political party, hoping to be picked as candidate in presidential polls.

Battling the 61-year-old retired general for the nomination of the centre-left People's Democratic Party (PDP) is a 66-year-old former civilian vice president, Alex Ekwueme, with the elections due in two weeks.

Ekwueme held the number two post from 1979 to 1983 in the last civilian administration of Africa's most populous nation. Ahead of the PDP congress, rivalry between his camp and those backing Obasanjo has become intense.

Up to 40 million Nigerians will vote next weekend for a two-chamber parliament, and then head back to the polls Feb. 27 to elect a new president.

Nigeria has been ruled by the military for all but four years since the country's first coup d'etat in 1966 and this month's

elections are aimed at ending that domination.

Early Saturday, with posters from the rival camps plastered over the small hill town, 2,500 convention delegates were being busily wooed by each side, seeking last-minute conversions of supporters of the other.

Obasanjo, who as a military man took the surrender of the Ibo forces in Nigeria's 1967-70 civil war, was military number two in the regime of the late Murtala Mohammed, killed in a 1976 coup.

The Yoruba general put down that coup and took charge, promising to hand over to a civilian regime three years later. In doing so, he became the first modern African military leader to transfer power voluntarily to civilians.

After leaving office, and the army, Obasanjo served on a series of international commissions and became increasingly vocal in criticism of subsequent military regimes.

In 1995, he was jailed on trumped up charges of plotting.

had apparently neglected his business interests, seeing their value fall.

The battle between Obasanjo and Ekwueme for the PDP's nomination has become increasingly bitter in recent days.

Ekwueme's team has flooded the papers and airwaves with advertisements portraying Obasanjo as an unformed military man, unable to pick up support in his own southwest region, or the east, and not overawed intellectually.

Obasanjo's aides have tried to give their man a more statesman-like image, but have not resisted a few low blows at Ekwueme.

The military administration that then took power set up tribunals to investigate widespread charges of corruption against the Shagari regime but found that, while many had profited, Ekwueme had actually left office a poorer man than he had come in.

As vice president, Ekwueme

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As vice president, Ekwueme

Judge in mass graves case concerned over government interference

JAFFNA, Sri Lanka (AP) — A judge presiding over the case of excavating a mass grave of 300 Tamil civilians allegedly killed by the military has accused the government of interfering in the judicial process, court officials and lawyers said Saturday.

Jaffna Additional Magistrate S.A.E. Ehanathan has taken exception to a Foreign Ministry statement that set the March 5 excavation date.

Ehanathan told the Judicial Service Commission in Colombo Friday that he has set no date for the excavation. He would review the situation on March 5 after hearing the preparations for the digging, court officials said on condition of anonymity.

The judge told the commission, which oversees judicial work, that he considered the ministry's statement an interference.

The Foreign Ministry Wednesday invited human rights groups and journalists to witness the excavation by scientists from two local universities and government

forensics experts under the supervision of a local magistrate.

It was not immediately known why the foreign ministry made the statement without consulting the judge. But the announcement coincided with the visit of President Chandrika Kumaratunga to Jamaica to attend the G-15 Summit.

Sri Lanka faces embarrassing situations at international meets over the issue.

A site near in the outskirts of Jaffna is believed to contain the bodies of about half the 600 Tamils who disappeared from military custody after government troops captured the peninsula in early 1996.

Jaffna, a Tamil-majority area, was a stronghold of guerrillas fighting for a homeland for minority Tamils.

A soldier convicted in July last year of the rape and murder of a family of Tamils told judges he had helped bury bodies near Jaffna, about 300 kilometres north of the capital, Colombo.

The government first ordered an inquiry in July

into the mass graves allegations. But work was delayed, the government says, because of floods and difficulties finding specialist investigators.

The rebels accuse the

majority Sinhalese of discriminating against the minority Tamils, a charge the government denies.

Over 57,000 people have died in the insurrection since 1983.

SECTION I. INVITATION FOR BIDS ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE WATER AUTHORITY OF JORDAN

INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)

Date: Feb. 8, 1999

Loan No.: 96 65 373 KfW Amman II

IFB No.: 6/99/KW

1. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has received a loan from Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau in Deutsche Marks for the Water Supply of Greater Amman. It is intended that part of the proceeds of this loan will be applied to eligible payments under the contract(s) for which this IFB has been issued.

2. The Water Authority now invites sealed bids from Bidders in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Federal Republic of Germany (eligible Bidders) for supply and installation of computer hardware and peripherals for the WAJ Amman Governorate computerisation.

3. Interested eligible Bidders may obtain further information from, and inspect the bidding documents at the office of the Secretary General, Purchasing & Procurement Division, Water Authority, P.O. Box 2412, Amman, Jordan, Tel: 880100, Tlx: 22439 WAJ JO, Fax: 579143.

4. A complete set of the tender documents may be purchased by any interested eligible Bidder on the submission of a written application to the above and upon payment of a non-refundable fee of JD150.

5. All bids must be submitted in separate envelopes, marked "technical" and "financial," be accompanied by a security in the amount of JD5,000 (in words: five thousand Jordan dinars) and must be delivered to the office not later than 1500 hours, Jordan local time, on Monday, 22/3/99.

6. Monday, 22/3/99, is the last day set for the purchasing of tender documents.

Clinton willing to commit U.S. forces to peacekeeping role

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Bill Clinton is offering to commit American ground troops to a NATO peacekeeping force in Kosovo if Serbs and ethnic Albanians overcome steep differences and reach a political settlement.

Clinton's decision, which he was disclosing in his weekly radio address Saturday, was hinted at Friday night by Sen. John Warner, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and then confirmed by a senior administration official.

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Letters of condolence

ON MY own behalf and on behalf of the government and people of Brunei Darussalam, I wish to extend to His Majesty King Abdullah my best wishes on his accession to the Throne of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

I pray to Allah Subhanahu wataala that He may guide Your Majesty and protect you at all times.

Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah
Brunei

IT IS with great regret and sorrow that we have received the message that the beloved King Hussein of Jordan has returned to eternity. The impact of his leadership for the development of Jordan and his endless strife for peace in the Middle East will never be forgotten by the international community.

The stability during King Hussein's long reign has fostered a climate in which the international tourism to Jordan and the whole Middle East has taken positive steps forward and opened up very interesting sites to the individual traveller. Without his efforts to stabilise the situation in the Middle East this progress would not have been possible. The international community of travel agency associations, which UFTAA represents, is mourning a great leader and a human personality of the highest standard.

On behalf of our President Assane Fall and myself I convey the federation's deeply felt sympathy at this tragic moment. King Hussein has returned to Allah.

We take opportunity at the same time to wish all success to King Abdullah in his difficult task to guide your country and people into the Millennium. May Allah be with him.

Birger Backman
Monaco

PLEASE EXTEND my condolences to your Royal Family and the people of your country. I, along with many around the world, mourn the loss of your King Hussein. He served as an inspiration to peoples all over the globe. May the peace he sought so valiantly come to pass.

Joan Newcomb
University of South Florida
Tampa
U.S.

I AM just an average American who would like to extend my condolences to the people of Jordan over the recent death of King Hussein.

I have followed world events and politics for over 30 years and have always felt King Hussein to be a man of peace, honour and integrity.

The entire world along with the people of Jordan will miss him.

Denis Pasquale
U.S.

ON BEHALF of the organisation, Medecins du Monde, Greece (Doctors of the World), we extend our sincerest condolences to His Majesty King Abdullah, the Royal Hashemite Family and the people of Jordan on the passing of His Majesty King Hussein.

May God rest his soul in peace.

Dr. Ekaterini Manoussaki
Ms. Marietta Hadzipetros
Amman

I CAME to Jordan for the first time a little over two years ago and fell in love with it. Since that time my family and I have made our home here. The warmth and friendliness of the Jordanian people have made us feel as though we are part of the family.

It is hard to describe the feeling of loss we share with the people of Jordan at the passing of His Majesty King Hussein. "The family" has lost a father, and the world has lost one of its greatest leaders.

Our hearts go out to His Majesty King Abdullah II, Her Majesty Queen Noor, the Royal family, and the people of Jordan. Our prayers are with them.

F. A. Shepard II and family,
formerly of Trinity, Alabama-U.S.
Aqaba

WITH GREAT sorrow and heartfelt sadness I and my family extend our deepest sympathy and sincere condolences to the Royal family on the passing away of His Majesty King Hussein. He was, in our opinion, an outstanding person: a wise leader, a statesman of vision, a tireless champion of peace and a noble man.

We have been staying in Jordan for 8 months, and during that time we came to love your wonderful country, its friendly and hospitable people, and, of course, King Hussein, who devoted his entire life to the well-being of his country and his people.

King Hussein will forever remain in our hearts as a man of dignity, courage, wisdom and honesty. We, together with other Russian people, will always treasure the memory of The Great King of Jordan, whose name will undoubtedly go down in history.

Anatoli Metelkine
ITAR-TASS reporter in Amman
Russia

PLEASE ALLOW us to extend our heartfelt condolences to the entire Royal Hashemite family and the Jordanian people on the demise of His Majesty King Hussein. We were deeply saddened when we heard the news of King Hussein's passing away. My wife, who is Jordanian, and I had the great honour of meeting His Majesty on several occasions. His Majesty was a true statesman, who had a charisma unlike anyone we have met.

Serving as a diplomat in Amman in the late eighties, I met my wife-to-be, we got married in Amman and our son was born there. How can you not have a strong feeling of belonging to the country and the Jordanian family, who were so good and dear to us. A devastating sense of loss has come over us.

Christina Peridakis-Fris and family
Bonn
Germany

ALL OF us at TCI have been shocked and saddened at the passing away of His Majesty King Hussein.

The whole world admired King Hussein. The whole of the Arabic World admired King Hussein. All of you in Jordan admired King Hussein. He was truly loved by all of mankind.

Shaun Metcalfe
Matt Richards
David Swan
Denyse Bradford
Ian Miller
Surrey
U.K.

TO DESCRIBE the greatest of kings I offer the words of a great poet:

"He was a man, take him for all in all; I shall not look upon his like again."

"...Only I have left to say, More is thy due than more than all can pay."

(quoted from Hamlet & Macbeth)

Mirna Janbek
Amman

I WISH to extend my condolences to the Royal Family on the death of your King.

As a Canadian, I am saddened and upset with the actions of our prime minister. Please do not judge all Canadians by the callous attitude of our prime minister. The world has lost a great man.

Vern Larsen
Cold Lake, Alberta
Canada

PLEASE ACCEPT my sincere wishes of support and condolences at the time of your great loss. I pray that Almighty God will grant King Hussein a just reward in Heaven and that the Jordanian people will experience peace, happiness and prosperity, along with all the peoples of the world.

Richard Nelson
U.S.

I AM writing to express my deepest condolences on the death of His Majesty King Hussein. It is so rare that such a man of character and strength passes through our lives. He was a leader of courage and strength and he touched the hearts and lives of people around the world. My thoughts and prayers are with you all as you cope with your loss, and particularly King Abdullah, as he has the additional burden of dealing with his grief while carrying on the historic traditions of leadership set by his father. May God bless you all.

Lesa Myrick
U.S.

WE SEND our deepest sympathy for the loss of the great King Hussein. The world lost a great man and we as American citizens but of Arabic heritage feel that the Arabic World was and always will be in need of someone like King Hussein to be its security and its guide.

Said and Salwa Mari
U.S.

THE WAVES were rumbling. The sun was trying to send some of its beauty down to earth, but there was a huge blockage of fog preventing its charm from reaching us to fill our hearts with warmth and happiness. The day is getting gloomier. The Queen inside mourning the loss of her beloved King. We could see her pale face glancing through the window watching the crowd as they got rowdier. Faces with no symmetry, no unity, no order, no nothing that would keep them together, but the grief and the loss of a dear father, friend, and life-long companion.

What would happen, what should happen if the sun came out. Never in a million years will the crowd forget or let go of his memory? Why and for what did their expressions look so inexplicable? It is as if time stood still; no plan for the moment, no thoughts for the future. Nothing seemed to matter or to make sense. I stood there stooping between the congregations, thinking what am I here for? The gate looked too far away for me to reach, but determination and stubbornness got me to stand still. The sky opened up, and I was thrown down, stepped on, felt that my heart left me for good. As I crawled down beneath trying to breathe or to stay alive, all of a sudden a band just pulled me up and shouted: "Stand in line." Whar? I didn't comprehend a word, felt like my chin was still smooched and in need of putting back in place. Finally the moment I was waiting for came. All of a sudden the cat ate my tongue. What shall I say to Her Majesty? All that struggle for this moment, and I am now speechless. I did remember saying God be with you but what I really meant is may God be with us all.

Jane Judeh
Amman

I AM an Indian writing from Calcutta. In July last year I travelled from Calcutta to London and I flew Royal Jordanian. I enjoyed my overnight stay in Amman, and I always respected King Hussein.

I would like to take this opportunity to reach as many Jordanians as possible and send them my condolences at this sad time.

Niladri R. Chatterjee
India

I AM eight years old. We love you King Hussein. We will miss you. We will never forget you because we love you. And we will not forget what you did for us. We love you, we love you, we love you. May you rest in peace.

Yacoub Majdoub
Amman

Yugoslavian delegation

AS THE Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was omitted in the Reuters' list of the countries attending the funeral ceremonies of late King Hussein printed in Jordan Times, we hope that Yugoslavia's attendance could be recognised in today's or the next issue of the Jordan Times in brief notice.

The delegation of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia:

1. His Excellency Mr. Momir Bulatovic, the Prime Minister of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia;

2. HE Mr. Zoran Novakovic, the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia;

3. HE Mr. Oliver Potezica, the Charge d'Affairs and Chief of the Mission, Embassy of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in Amman;

4. HE Mr. Dusan Simeonovic, the Ambassador at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia;

5. Mr. Ratko Kontic, Special Advisor of the Prime Minister of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Embassy of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
Amman



IT IS with great sadness and despair that we the Jordanian students at Purdue University extend our deepest and most sincere condolences for the passing away of His Majesty King Hussein Ben Talal, a dear father, a courageous leader and a great man.

It is a sad day for all of us as we witness the loss of a man that has brought a new meaning to the words courage, bravery and heroism. A man who has been a great idol for all, a father of Jordan and the entire Arab World. King Hussein was a true soldier of peace who brought great visions and achievements to Jordan and the Middle East. He sheltered his nation and his people and brought security, pride and sense of worth to all of us. Through his leadership and charisma, the people of Jordan prospered and flourished in the eyes of the world.

It is indeed a hard time for all of us to be away from our beloved country witnessing our people's devotion in paying their tributes to His Majesty. With all of our hearts, we share the grief of such a terrible loss and join our Jordanian brothers and sisters in mourning and paying tribute to our great leader.

His Majesty's reminiscences and good memories will always remain in our hearts and the hearts of many others who appreciate the achievements and triumphs that he brought to his loyal people, great country and to the Arab region. King Hussein has left us with a legacy and a spark of hope to carry in his footsteps and achieve the triumphs that he has launched and fathered through his lifetime.

May God bless him and bless his family and the Jordanian people.

We belong to God, and to God we shall return

Elias Samir Kawar
U.S.

THE HERO of our times

*Glorious, majestic and grand
humble, enchanting, he is the father of the land
We all worship the grounds he walked on and now we
pray on the soil he rests under*

*The gloomy skies shed their tears
Flooding the weeping throngs with a deluge of troubled
waters and fears
His paean of eloquence and wisdom rest engraved till
the end of time*

*A celestial gift made mundane
A "Saint" in a glimmering age of gloom and bane
His spirit lives amongst us for eternity*

*My words are scarce, for poetry is very obscure, personal
and erotic
I feel handicapped, lamented by his curtains, and
unable to produce a worthy eulogy*

*His greatness is unfathomable
Blurred by his vibrant proficiency as he holds the
enigmatic throne*

*The pulchritude of the rite we all witnessed is a sorrowful
ful memory
One that coalesces pride and inner peace*

*It was a baneful tribulation
One that bridged the world's cultures and foes together
in unearthly silence*

*We are mixed beings, mixed with darkness and light
Sense and intellect, flesh and spirit*

*He is lightness, a spirit of his own and an intellectual
of all times*

*Placid, taciturn and still he now lies
Benevolent, noble, meritorious, virtuous and kind he
will remain*

God bless his soul.

Merissa Khurma
McGill University
Montreal, Canada

Developing nations demand reforms in financial world order

MONTEGO BAY. Jamaica (AP) — Leaders of developing nations Friday urged restricting the ability of currency speculators and multinational corporations to bring havoc upon their economies.

Yearning for a stronger voice on the world stage, the diverse nations of the "Group of 15" agreed that a more humane financial world order was needed to prevent a few players from getting richer at the expense of hundreds of millions of poor.

"We have been reminded of the spread of the consequences of the process of globalisation in a world that has become increasingly cold and heartless," Jamaica's Prime Minister P.J. Patterson said in closing the summit of 17 nations, which represent some 30 percent of the world's population.

The fallout from Southeast Asia's financial crisis makes it clear that industrialised nations must address the developing world's concerns.

It called for:

— International rules to monitor large financial players, especially hedge funds and currency speculators blamed in part for the Asian crisis. That fell short of Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's calls for an international regulating body.

— Social safety nets in development policies and programmes to meet the needs of the poorest.

— Speedy implementation of initiatives by the Group of 8 (G-8) industrialised nations and the European Union to forgive the debts of the poorest countries.

— Urgent programmes to fight increasing poverty and unemployment "as a means for ensuring international peace and stability."

— Opposing "disguised protectionist measures" by industrialised countries and the use of trade sanctions to achieve environmental objectives.

— Resisting "unilateral measures with extra-territorial effects" — an apparent reference to the U.S. economic embargo against Cuba.

— A comprehensive international covenant to combat terrorism.

The leaders also called for more dialogue with the G-8 to change policies at the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, which they said reacted too late and with too little aid to the Asian crisis.

A.F.M TRADE Saturday, 13-02-99 ACCESS 4646868

COUNTRY	CLOSE	CLOSE	CLOSE
BANKS			
ARAB BK			
INT'L BK	214.500	215.000	+ 0.23%
INT'L BK	1.490	1.520	+ 2.01%
JO. OF JO	1.260	1.300	+ 3.02%
MIDDLE EAST BK	0.970	0.980	+ 2.08%
INDUSTRIAL DEV. BK	1.460	1.510	+ 3.42%
THE HOUSING BK	2.760	2.900	+ 5.07%
JO. KUWAIT BK	1.870	1.870	0.00%
JO. GULF BK	0.670	0.700	+ 4.48%
JO. ISLAMIC BK	1.670	1.690	+ 1.20%
JO. INVEST. FIN. BK	1.290	1.290	0.00%
PHILADELPHIA BK	0.510	0.540	+ 5.88%
BANKS INDEX			
	262.920	point =	+ 0.99%
INSURANCE			
JO. FRENCH INS	2.790	2.830	+ 1.43%
INSURANCE INDEX			
	125.750	point =	+ 0.20%
SERVICES			
ELECTRIC POWER	1.700	1.790	+ 5.29%
PORTFOLIO SECURITIES	0.780	0.820	+ 5.13%
JO. INT'L TRADING CENT	0.260	0.270	+ 3.85%
AL-ZARQA FOR EDUC	0.880	0.890	+ 0.00%
UNIFIED LAND TRANS	1.160	1.200	+ 3.45%
SERVICES INDEX			
	113.820	point =	+ 1.21%
INDUSTRY			
CEMENT	3.680	3.750	+ 1.90%
PHOSPHATE	2.350	2.470	+ 5.11%
ARAB POTASH	3.850	4.040	+ 4.94%
PETROLEUM REFINERY	10.730	10.860	+ 1.25%
THE IND. COMM. & AGRIC	1.090	1.090	0.00%
WORSTED MILLS	5.550	5.650	+ 1.80%
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL	3.130	3.290	+ 5.11%
CERAMIC IND	1.230	1.280	+ 4.88%
TOBACCO & CIGARET	1.340	1.390	+ 3.73%
JO. PIPES	1.100	1.120	+ 1.82%
DAR AL DAWA	5.450	5.720	+ 4.95%
MIDDLE EAST COMPLEX	0.540	0.570	+ 5.66%
JO. STEEL	0.950	0.980	+ 3.16%
ARAB ALUMINUM	1.850	1.920	+ 3.78%
CHLORINE	1.200	1.220	+ 1.67%
LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	0.380	0.410	+ 5.13%
INT'L IND	0.360	0.360	0.00%
PETRO- CHEMICAL	0.300	0.320	+ 6.67%
UNIVERSAL CHEMICAL	0.970	1.020	+ 5.15%
INT'L CABLE	0.620	0.660	+ 6.84%
SULPHO - CHEMICALS	0.380	0.400	+ 5.26%
ARAB CENTER FOR PHAR	1.330	1.390	+ 4.51%
TEL-ZAY	1.310	1.320	+ 0.76%
UNIVERSAL MODERN IND	0.670	0.680	+ 1.49%
IND. RESOURCES	0.480	0.470	- 2.08%
NEW CAPLES	0.610	0.620	+ 1.64%
INT'L ALUMINUM	0.710	0.720	+ 1.41%
INDUSTRY INDEX			
	96.770	point =	+ 3.61%

Exchange Rates Saturday, 13-02-99

CURRENCY	JORDAN DINAR	ACCESS 4646868			
		YEMENI RIAL	BAHRAIN DINAR	QATARI DINAR	EGYPTIAN POUND
JORDAN DINAR	1.0000	0.1888	0.1927	1.8785	0.1944
SAUDI RIAL	5.2976	1.0000	1.0239	9.5478	1.0300
UAE DIRHAM	1.1893	0.9798	1.0000	9.7443	0.9426
BAHRAIN DINAR	0.5325	0.1005	0.1028	1.0000	0.1035
QATAR RIAL	0.5438	0.1027	0.1048	1.0211	0.1057
QATAR RIAL	5.1434	0.9709	0.9912	9.6581	0.9482
KUWAIT DINAR	0.4277	0.0807	0.0821	0.9793	0.1107
EGYPT POUND	4.8114	0.9062	0.9273	9.0340	0.9355
LEBANON LIRA	21.4831	4.0562	4.1399	40.3405	38.5055
U.S. DOLLAR	1.4124	0.2865	0.2722	2.6522	2.5973
GERMAN MARK	0.8655	0.1634	0.1638	1.5915	2.0336
GERMANY MARK	2.4468	0.4619	0.4715	4.5946	4.4995
SWITZERLAND FRA	1.9976	0.3771	0.3849	3.7511	3.6734
FRANCE FRANC	8.2063	1.5491	1.5497	15.0097	15.0097
JAPAN YEN	1.8114	0.3047	0.3111	3.0116	2.9688
HOLLAND GULDEN	2.7589	0.5204	0.5313	5.1769	5.0589
SWEDEN KRONA	11.1520	2.1051	2.1480	20.9410	20.5079
ITALY LIRA	24.2236	4.5728	4.6560	45.4867	44.5455
BELGIUM FRANC	9.9262	1.8755	1.9112	9.8162	9.8045
AUSTRIA DOLLA	2.1938	0.4134	0.4220	4.1120	4.0269
GREEK DRACHMA	4.0226	0.3923	0.3945	6.7553	6.3970
CYPRUS POUND	1.3774	0.5172	0.5280	5.1453	5.0388
ARMENIA DRAMA	17.2147	3.2495	3.3174	32.3259	31.6564
CANADA DOLLAR	2.1081	0.5679	0.4062	3.2685	3.0785
EURO	1.2510	0.2362	0.2411	3.3492	3.2006

CURRENCY	YEMENI RIAL	GERMAN MARK	SWITZERLAND FRA	FRANCE FRANC	JAPAN YEN	THAILAND BAHT	EURO
U.S. DOLLAR	1.0000	1.6320	0.5772	0.7071	1.1721	0.8749	0.5123
GERMANY MARK	0.1007	1.1140	0.5351	0.4332	1.0255	0.5381	0.3139
SWITZERLAND FRA	1.7234	2.2672	1.0000	1.2428	2.0892	1.5156	1.0101
GERMANY MARK	1.4143	2.3081	0.9164	1.0000	1.2374	0.7246	0.4265
FRANCE FRANC	5.6101	6.4820	3.3339	4.1061	1.0000	5.0832	3.5774
JAPAN YEN	114.3000	188.5737	85.0795	82.6174	19.6727	1.0000	58.5576
HOLLAND GULDEN	1.9519	3.1855	1.1267	1.3801	0.3380	1.7077	1.0000
SWEDEN KRONA	7.8895	12.8855	4.5577	5.5827	1.3580	6.9278	4.0457
ITALY LIRA	17.1503	27.9659	9.9000	12.1084	2.9516	15.0048	6.7864
BELGIUM FRANC	35.7308	58.3124	20.9255	25.3038	6.1498	31.2604	18.3054
AUSTRIA DOLLA	1.5504	2.5302	0.8050	1.0962	0.2688	1.3564	0.8243
GREEK DRACHMA	2.8479	4.6476	1.6439	2.0136	0.4902	2.9116	1.4950
CYPRUS POUND	1.9400	3.1681	1.1199	1.7311	0.3339	1.9538	1.1111
AUSTRIA SCHILLING	12.1880	19.5900	6.5142	8.5142	0.3339	1.7144	1.1141
CANADA DOLLAR	1.4952	2.4358	0.65				

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Attracting, consolidating investments seen needing qualified, active personnel

** ACCORDING TO Fawzi Tuayneh, a member of the Lower House of Parliament, the government measures to activate, encourage and attract investment are still below the ambitions. "The economic measures require a strong, active and qualified state administration that would monitor, evaluate and follow-up these measures," he stressed. Tuayneh demanded that the concerned parties do the utmost to rehabilitate the administrative cadres of all civil servants in all sectors.

"This is a basic and vital matter to consolidate the reality and opportunities of investment to correspond with the ambitions of those who formulate national legislations," the deputy said. "The rehabilitation would surpass the bureaucratic measures which often represent the main barrier to lure investment."

Tuayneh highlighted the Egyptian investment model and saw it as a guide for the officials in the Kingdom from the point of view of administrative and legal mentality and the facilities provided in addition to the infrastructure. The Egyptian model was also seen by the member of Parliament as being outside the mentality of penalising and imposing fines on investors.

The deputy emphasised the importance of foreign investors teaming up with local partners because that would consolidate the trust of the

investors in finding guides who know the ins and outs of many vital and important issues and, as such, can facilitate many procedures and transactions.

Wahib Shaer, board chairman of the Jordan Gulf Insurance Company said there must be a vital administration capable of initiating direct contacts with local and foreign capitalists. "Providing them with all the necessary information for their investment operations would create and consolidate the investment climate and opportunities in an encouraging manner," Shaer added.

The chairman of the insurance company indicated that consolidating investment requires an administrative cadre capable of managing, implementing and explaining various laws in a correct manner. "However," he said, "the international economic crises have proved at this stage that global openness should be gradual so as any mistake or negative effect of the policies or programmes of such an openness will have a limited impact."

Shaer concluded that there is an imbalance in the Kingdom's economic laws and that reflects negatively on the investment performance. He stressed that there should be incentives and commissions to encourage the good investment efforts (Al Arab Al Yawm).

The Polish Ladies Club in Jordan joins the Hashemite family and Jordanian people mourning the demise of His Majesty King Hussein Ben Talal who has won love and respect. King Hussein

will remain in our memory as a man of great courage, modesty and remarkable vision who dedicated all his life to this land and its people. May his soul rest in peace and may God give us all the strength to honour his legacy of compassion, love and peace



The Islamic Academy of Sciences Amman - Jordan

The Council, Fellows, Director General and Staff of the Islamic Academy of Sciences in Amman mourn the passing away of **HIS MAJESTY KING HUSSEIN I** and extend their sympathy and sincere condolences to **His Majesty King Abdullah II**, His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hamzah Ben Al Hussein, His Royal Highness Prince Hassan Ben Talal / Founding Patron of the Islamic Academy of Sciences and members of the Royal Hashemite Family and the government and people of Jordan.

Islamic Academy of Sciences, P.O. Box 830036, Amman-11183



Trico International & Capri TT

Deeply regret with sorrow & grief the demise of the beloved King Father Of The Nation & a Great Leader **His Majesty King Hussein Ben Talal** and extend their deepest condolences to **His Majesty King Abdullah Ben Al Hussein, The Royal Hashemite Family and the Jordanian people**

South Korean banks register record losses

SEOUL (AFP) — Crisis-hit South Korean banks registered a record net loss of 14.48 trillion won (\$12.32 billion) last year amid mounting provisions for bad debts, financial watchdogs have said.

The 1998 data represented a whopping 370 per cent increase from the previous year's loss of 3.88 trillion won, the Financial Supervisory Commission (FSC) said.

"It was a record net loss," an FSC official said, adding only three of the country's 22 institutions — Hanil, KorAm and Shinhan banks — turned in profits last year.

The rise reflected stricter prudential regulations on provisions for bad loans, an increasing number of corporate failures and more reserves for retirement.

The government has earmarked some 64 trillion won for the purchase of bad loans, recapitalisation and deposit insurance.

Officials estimate that bad loans run up by all domestic institutions exceed 100 trillion won.

Hanil was the best performing institution last year with its 1998 net profit jumping to 110.8

billion won from 43.5 billion won a year ago.

Hanil boasted that lower provisions for bad loans, wider interest-rate margins and increased commissions boosted income.

KorAm Bank registered a record net profit of 53.4 billion won in 1998, compared with a loss of 37.1 billion won a year earlier.

Its low non-performing loan ratio of 2.99 per cent helped underpin earnings, KorAm spokesman said, adding foreign-currency trading and exchange fees boosted income.

"This year, we expect a net profit of 200 billion won on stable interest income, services charges, and bond trading commissions," he added.

Kookmin also made a net profit of 73.4 billion won last year but its actual balance sheet will be available after it completes the acquisition of a long-term credit bank.

Net losses at five major banks — Seoulbank, Chubung, Hanjin, Korea First, and Korea Exchange banks — accounted for 76 per cent of the total.

Commercial Bank, which has agreed to combine with Hanil Bank, posted a net loss of 1.64

billion won, compared to Hanil's loss of 1.7 trillion won.

The FSC said the integrated net loss of Commercial and Hanil banks would not be available until the institutions complete their merger process, which will require massive but unspecified debt write-offs by the government.

Korea First, which was sold to a U.S.-led consortium in December, suffered a net loss of 2.6 trillion won last year, up from a loss of 1.6 trillion won in 1997.

The net loss of Seoulbank, which has yet to find a foreign owner, also jumped to 2.24 trillion won last year from the previous year's 916 billion won.

The sale of Korea First and Seoulbank has been a key condition of a \$57 billion bailout extended by the International Monetary Fund in late 1997.

The bailout prompted a sweeping reform drive to clean the mess at banks, which have been strangled by high loans-to-deposit ratios, low returns on equity and a high proportion of shares in their portfolios.

Total costs were down 17.4 per cent year-on-year to six trillion won, assets up 2.2 per cent to 574.6 trillion won, and deposits up 1.4 per cent to 389 trillion won.

Total lending slipped 4.3 per cent to 270 trillion won, but securities holdings were up 2.8 per cent to 191 trillion won.

The FSC last year dissolved five non-viable institutions, including Chungcheong and Kyongki banks. Hanil took over Chungcheong while KorAm acquired Kyongki Bank.

It estimated the combined recurring profit of 22 institutions at 4.8 trillion won last year, up 56.6 percent year-on-year on increased won interest income, foreign exchange gains, stock gains and lower costs.

Their extraordinary losses, arising from non-performing loans and stock trading losses, rose to 7.5 trillion won from 2.2 trillion won.

The combined interest income fell 8.3 per cent year-on-year to 8.4 trillion won due to higher foreign currency borrowing costs and losses from foreign currency assets.

Brokers said the brisk trading defied fears among investors that the King's sudden death would reflect negatively on the stock market.

Naim Naqeeb, a broker, said that pledges by foreign states, especially Arab Gulf countries and the United States, to extend economic assistance to the Kingdom have "injected confidence" among investors.

"News about foreign assistance have created optimism in the stock market which reflected positively in yesterday's activities," Naqeeb told the Jordan Times.

"The smooth succession, proving that institutionalism is deeply rooted in the country, eased the fears of investors," the broker added.

Amer Muasher, another broker, said trading focused on the "most active shares" blue-chips, which are expected to record good profit this year.

The AFM's price index jumped to 181.1 points compared to 178.1 points in the previous week, when most of the shares also recorded increase in their prices.

Out of the 62 firms that changed hands on the floor, shares of 53 companies recorded increase in their prices, two registered decrease while seven firms recorded no change in their prices, the bulletin showed.

Muasher highlighted that the major blue-chips, mainly the cement, potash, phosphate, pharmaceutical companies and the Electric Power, recorded a limit-up increase in their share prices.

The cement share price rose to JD3.750 up from JD3.680 while the potash share price closed at JD4.040 up from JD3.850.

The Arab Bank, the Kingdom's largest financial institution, rose by 500 fils amid low demand for its shares.

The daily trading amounted to JD2.6 million, the bulk of which was recorded by the industrial sector, mainly the pharmaceutical industry.

Arab Pharmaceutical Manufacturing recorded JD833,130 during yesterday's activities followed by the Jordan Electric Power which won JD 409,600 while the Housing Bank ranked third with JD301,889, the one-page bulletin showed.

Muasher said brokers and investors expect active trading during the coming days.

Muasher noted that primary results of major firms show good profits in the past year "which will enhance the confidence and trading in the stock market."

AFM keeps upward tempo

By Tareq Ayyoub

AMMAN — Trading at the Amman Financial Market (AFM) rose by three points after it reopened Saturday following five days of official mourning.

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Muasher noted that primary results of major firms show good profits in the past year "which will enhance the confidence and trading in the stock market."

Join the Hashemite family, Royal Jordanian, the Royal Jordanian Air Force and the Jordanian people in their deep sorrow at the loss of

His Majesty King Hussein Ben Talal, a great Pilot and Aviator.

May his soul rest in peace.

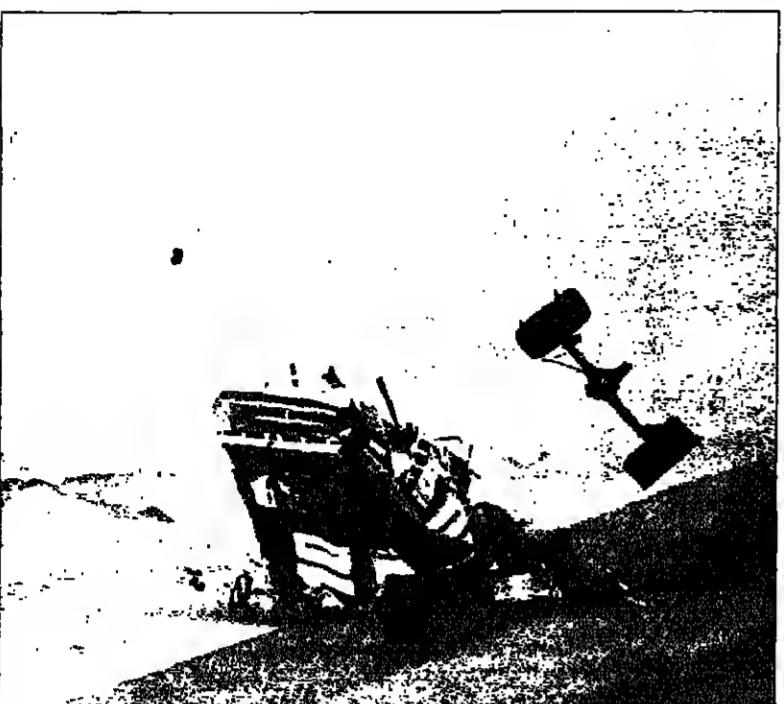


THE DEAREST OF MEN

YOU WILL REMAIN IN OUR HEARTS THROUGHOUT OUR LIVES

THE HOLY LANDS ESTABLISHMENT
DALLAS / U.S.A.

Slew of crashes alters Busch field



Danny Bagwell's race car breaks apart after he crashed heading toward the start-finish line with just four laps left in the Goody's Dash at Daytona International Speedway on Friday. His car barrel-rolled eight times before coming to a stop in the apron, with every piece of sheet metal sheared off the body by the time it stopped. After the car came to rest on the track, Bagwell pulled himself from the car and waited for rescue personnel to reach him. (AP photo)

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (AP) — Busch Series champion Dale Earnhardt Jr. crashed twice within two hours Friday, and the second one created a four-car wreck that could drastically alter the season-opening race.

Earnhardt was one of six Busch drivers whose cars were damaged enough in practice to force them into backups. Under NASCAR rules, they must drop to the rear of the field at the start of the NAPA Auto Parts 300 on Saturday.

The 24-year-old driver took the blame for the wreck that also involved Ted Musgrave, Dick Trickle and Jeff Burton. He tried to put his car between a slowly moving Michael Waltrip and Musgrave, who was up to speed.

"I probably shouldn't have stuck my nose in there," said Earnhardt, who also wrecked in the IROC race before practice.

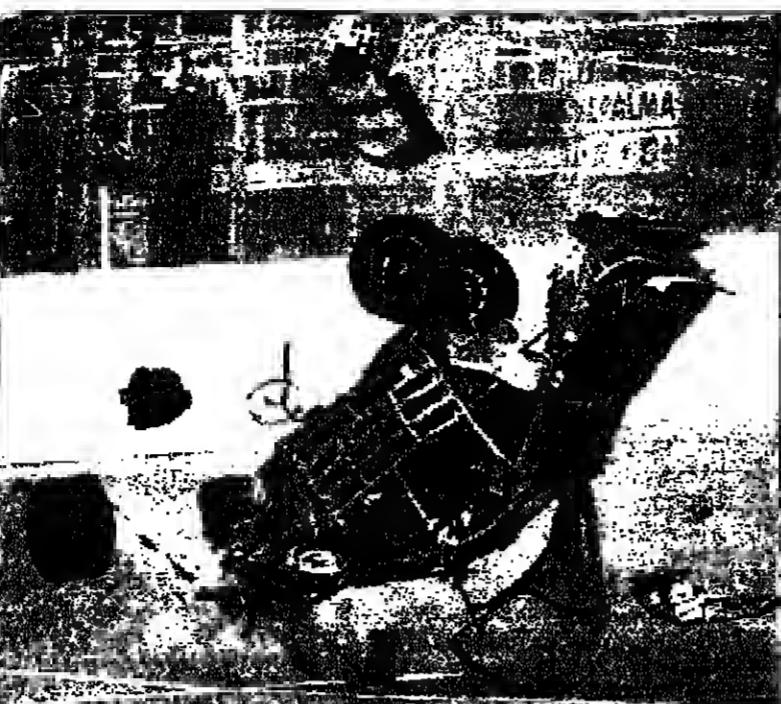
"I should have backed off."

Musgrave's car was badly damaged, and he was forced to borrow one of Jeff Purvis' backups. Musgrave said more caution is needed during practice.

"You need to slow down and pick your way through rather than trying to barrel through there," he said.

Two-time Busch champion Randy LaJoie agreed, saying Earnhardt still has much to learn about racing on a fast track such as the 2-mile Daytona International Speedway.

"This is practice," LaJoie said.



"They don't pay to win practice. I hope people realize that. We've got a garage full of torn race cars."

LaJoie said Earnhardt hurt his own chance of winning by wrecking his primary car. He doesn't think Earnhardt can be as effective in a backup.

"I'm sure his backup car is going to be good, too," LaJoie said. "But without no practice on the stuff, he's going to have a tough day tomorrow."

Earnhardt also was one of four drivers who crashed out of the season-opening IROC event won by his father. Also taken out in that crash were Burton, Rusty Wallace and Eddie Cheever.

There were no injuries in the Busch or IROC wrecks, but four

drivers were sent to the hospital with injuries from crashes in the Discount Auto Parts 200, a NASCAR subcompact race earlier in the day.

Two of them were treated and released. Two others underwent surgery for broken legs.

Busch driver Todd Bodine blamed the track for his crash, that also took out Glenn Allen.

"The track's filthy from the Dash race and IROC," Bodine said. "I ran over something ... hit the wall and then Glenn Allen ran into the side of me."

Tim Fedewa, Matt Kenseth, and Chuck Bown also were involved in accidents. Only Fedewa and Kenseth will start Saturday in their primary cars.

SAN JOSE, California (AP)

— Though he slammed 12 aces and a bunch of unreturnable groundstrokes, the biggest shot of Pete Sampras' quarterfinal win over Bernd Karpf in the Sybase Open was his softest.

The top-seeded Sampras, who has not faced a break point in the tournament, began with an ace and ended with another as he reached the semifinals with a 7-5, 6-3 win Friday night.

Sampras will play his semifinal tonight against third-seeded Mark Philippoussis, a 6-2, 3-6, 7-6 (7-3) winner over Justin Gimelstob.

The point that began Sampras' only break of the second set would have made most ballet dancers proud.

Karpf hit a lob over Sampras' head and far to his left.

Sampras, backpedalling quickly and barely managing to maintain his balance, reached high above his head and just tapped the ball back for a winner.

That was his first point of the sixth game of the second set.

He went on to break Karpf's serve to take a 4-2 lead, then held his own serve twice to finish off the match.

"It was an unusual point," Sampras said. "I was happy to somehow hit an overhead. My feet kind of got stuck. And I used my little athletic ability to hit that shot. My athletic ability really helped me out there."

Sampras, returning from a 10-week layoff, did not appear to be at all bothered by a blister that has developed on his right hand during the tournament.

"I was pleased with the way I played tonight. I'm where I want to be,"

Sampras said. "My tennis has gotten better throughout the week."

Philippoussis, who had 11 aces, broke for a 3-5 lead in the third set, but Gimelstob broke right back and forced a tiebreaker. In the tiebreaker, though, Philippoussis turned up the pressure against a tiring Gimelstob.

If Gimelstob had won, there would have been four Americans in the semifinals — the first time that would have happened in an ATP tour event since 1995.

Gimelstob, two days after being handed a place in his first career quarterfinals when Andre Agassi was defaulted for cursing, played his way into the semifinals on Friday.

Mamit

outlasted

Mark

Woodforde

7-6 (7-5), 4-6,

6-3 in a match that went 2 hours 27 minutes to reach a semifinal match against fourth-seeded Michael Chang, one of his role models.

Mamit, who began the year ranked 132nd in the world, probably will move up to the Top 100 with his win over Woodforde. It was his first quarterfinal match in an ATP tour event, and he got there because Agassi was defaulted while leading Mamit by a set.

Mamit, who lost the first set 6-0 to Agassi, was leading four points to none in the tiebreaker when Agassi had his outburst. The victory left Mamit with an empty feeling.

"I would have liked to play that match and get that motivation, knowing I could compete against him," Mamit said of the second-round match. "I couldn't take anything away from it."

"All I could do was justify the fact I was in the quarterfinals and take advantage of it. This certainly helps. I can't say right now I could

Sampras' biggest shot is his softest

have beaten Agassi that day, but I'm happy with my result today."

Chang was a 6-1, 7-5 winner over Christian Ruud in Friday's other afternoon quarterfinal.

Mamit, the 1996 NCAA singles champion from Southern California, has tried to incorporate Chang's running style and mental toughness into his game. He also identifies with Chang because they're of similar height — about 5-foot-8, short by today's tennis standards — and of Asian heritage.

Chang, of Chinese-American background, has been a hero to many Asian-Americans. Mamit, a native of Los Angeles whose parents are Filipino, has similar hopes.

"I've always tried to do the same things he has. He's taken the Asian route, becoming a role model for Asian kids," Mamit said. "I guess I'll be a role model for Asians also."

Chang said he's excited to be facing someone of a similar background.

"I haven't had the opportunity to be able to play that many Asians in my career," he said. "For me growing up, there were very few Asians playing. Now there are quite a few and they're doing well. That's pretty exciting to see."

Mamit became the first qualifier to reach the semifinals of the Sybase Open since Danie Visser did it in 1988. Visser lost to Chang in the semifinals.

GS is the basis of ski technique



Marco Buechel of Liechtenstein hits a gate during the first run in the men's giant slalom on Friday during the 1999 World Alpine Ski Championships in Vail, Colorado. Buechel is in first place after the first run with a time of 1:13.31 (AP photo).

the beauty of the GS turn is, once you've got it down, it takes you everywhere you need to go, including the other three disciplines.

Downhill and super-G, although happening at much greater speeds, demand the same basic technique.

"If you don't know how to make a GS turn, you can't ski downhill," Austrian men's coach Wolfgang Frandl said. Wahliquist and Frandl say that when their racers are having trouble in any other event, they go right back to training GS. "Back to the basics." The fact is, downhill racers only train downhill two or three times a year outside the race season, mostly because it's too hard to find the training space, but also because GS can prepare them just as well.

It is the basics that make

this event so incredibly difficult to master. Precision is a must, but somewhere in there you have to find room for just the right amount of reckless abandon.

There is no faking your way to a successful run of GS; to be fast, it has to be done right. And when it is done right, it is spectacular.

The last two days of GS racing in the World Alpine Ski Championships didn't disappoint. We saw three women on the podium who validated a season of strong results, displaying such mastery of technique that it seemed almost easy.

Then, in one of the most exciting races I have watched in a long time, the men put on a clinic. With so many men able to vie for the podium, they had to find a little extra. I couldn't help but smile in awe as the men risked everything for those medals.

Even though they were skiing a little over the edge, basic technique shone through in every one of those winning runs.

"GS," said fourth-place finisher Paul Accola, "is the base of all skiing. You have only to look at (gold medalist) Lasse Kjus for this."

RICHMOND, California (AP) — The Richmond High boys' basketball team has been hunched again.

On Thursday, one day before the team's biggest game of the season, coach Kenny Carter canceled practice and shipped his team to mandatory study hall.

Carter made headlines last month when, dismayed by a lack of academic focus, he banned the Oilers from all basketball-related activities, including practices and rallies.

The team missed a non-league game and an alumni game; when they returned to the court after a week, Gov. Gray Davis was in the crowd to show support for the coach's move.

"I think he's a hero," Davis said of Carter. "Obviously, not every kid is going to the NBA. How they do in school will determine how they do in life."

The Richmond players weren't in

any danger of failing: they all had the 2.0 grade point average the district requires before a student can play.

But the team signed contracts with the coach back in September to maintain a 2.3 GPA, and they were falling short.

Carter said he took the latest action because team members were not taking part in daily tutoring sessions that went into effect after the lockout ended.

"For some reason, our young men are starting to slip away," Carter said Thursday in announcing the study hall move. "It's not the overall academics but our study habits and attitudes that concern me. If we can spend the added time studying, our overall grades will have no choice but to go up."

Richmond is 18-4 overall and 5-4 in the Alameda Contra Costa Athletic League.

High school coach benches team again

Hingis 'stupid' for remarks on sexuality, Mauresmo says

PARIS (AP) — French star Amelie Mauresmo said Saturday that World No. 1 Martina Hingis was "out of line" when she made remarks about her homosexuality during the Australian Open.

Speaking publicly for the first time since the tournament — where Mauresmo lost to Hingis in the final —

the 19-year-old vowed to ignore the focus on her sexuality and seek to win a Grand Slam event this year.

"Hingis was stupid for what she said; she was out of line."

But I respect her and I think she respects me," Mauresmo said, speaking to reporters at a central Paris bar. "I don't have a lot to

say about it. It is her problem."

Before the final of the showpiece event, the Swiss player — speaking in German at a press conference — was reported to have said "she's here with her girlfriend, she's half a man," when asked about her opponent.

Hingis denied making the

remark but her comments were widely televised and sensationalised in some of the Australian press.

Two weeks later, Mauresmo said she is looking to learn from her experiences in Melbourne.

"There was a lot of pressure from journalists toward the end of the tournament and I am not used to that."

Mauresmo said, hours after arriving from a vacation in New Caledonia. "It was the first time that I played in a tournament for two weeks and it was tiring, physically and mentally."

Mauresmo, the first top player since Martina Navratilova to talk publicly about being gay, won the French Open and

Wimbledon junior titles in 1996, and is shooting up the world rankings, climbing from No. 109 at the start of last year to her current position of No. 18.

Now, her aim is to win a Grand Slam event.

"I have a lot of confidence and feel I can go all the way," she said. "Since I was a girl my dream has been to

win a Grand Slam. All I am missing now is experience."

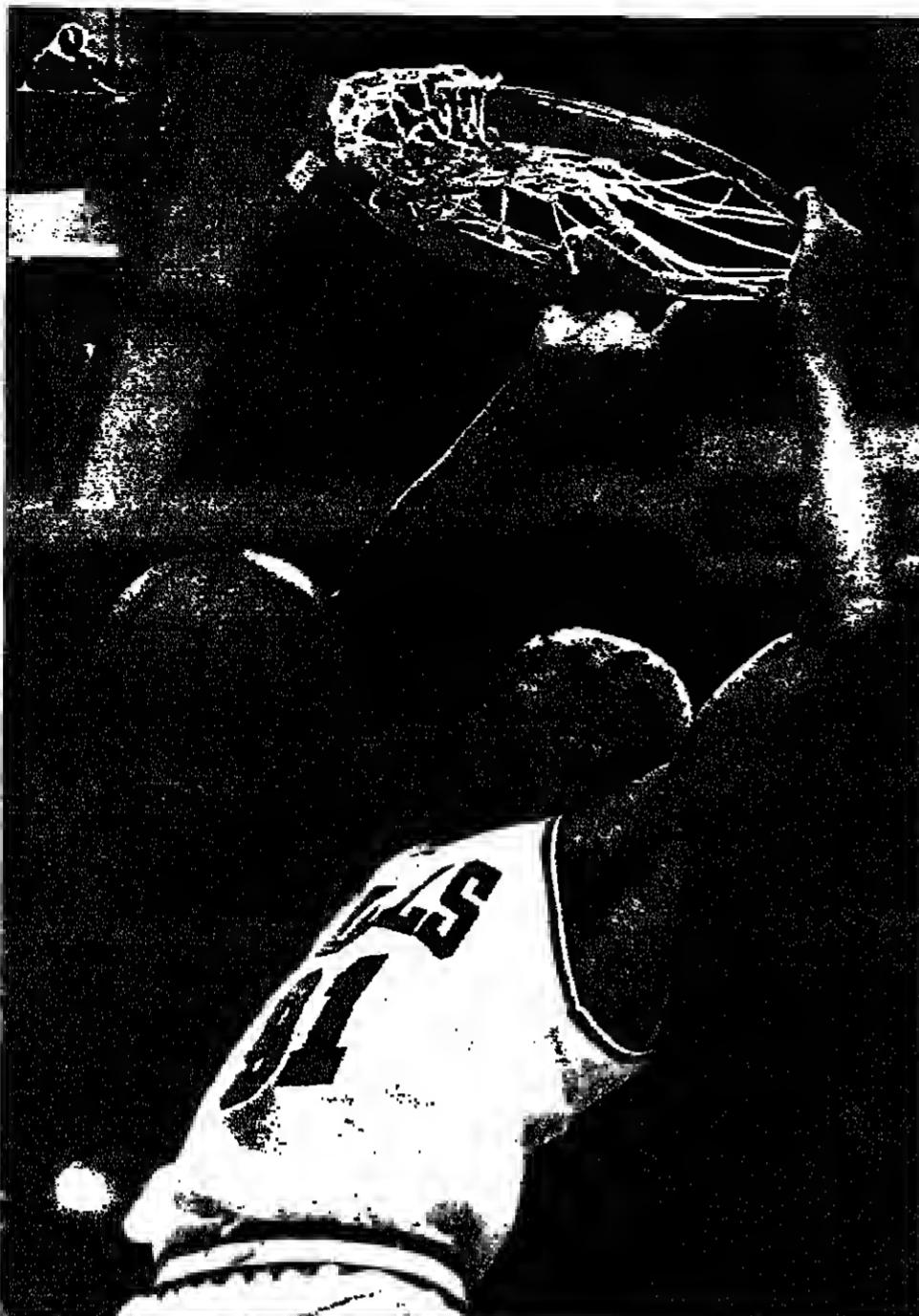
But Mauresmo played down her rapid rise to stardom.

"This is not going to change my life," she said. "I will continue to do the same things."

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Sports

Dennis Rodman agrees to sign with Lakers — report



Dennis Rodman (File photo)

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Dennis Rodman, the NBA's seven-time rebounding champ and one of the league's most flamboyant players, has decided to play for the Los Angeles Lakers, the Los Angeles Times reported Saturday.

Rodman, known for his dyed hair and cross-dressing as well as his ferocious defense and rebounds, has agreed to play for the veterans' minimum of \$1 million — pro-rated to \$100,000 for this lockout shortened season, sources told the Times in

a story published Saturday.

He will also earn \$3 million from an endorsement contract with Converse, the Times said.

Rodman's agent, Steve Chasman of International Creative Management, has been negotiating with the team for the past two weeks. Talks became sidetracked for a week while they discussed a possible movie deal with Fox, which holds an option to buy into the Lakers as a 10 percent partner.

mandatory defense.

"I want a tough fight, a good competitive fight," De La Hoya said. "I need to fight the tough guys to bring out the best in me." He's found one in Quartey (34-0-1), although the native of Ghana hasn't fought in 16 months and is coming off a draw in which he was knocked down in the 11th round of his last fight with Jose Lopez.

Quartey has 29 knockouts and is a solid puncher with both hands, although his straight-ahead style may be made for the boxer in De La Hoya. He weighed 146 1/2 pounds Friday to 147 for the champion.

"I have to figure out what I want to do," De La Hoya said.

"Do I want to impress my fans and the whole boxing world to see who is the last guy standing or do I box him and take him to school? I have to figure that out maybe in the first or second round of the fight." De La Hoya has fought — and beaten — the likes of Julio Cesar Chavez, Pernell Whitaker and Hector "Macho" Camacho, but even he views the 29-year-old Quartey as his first opponent with a legitimate chance of upsetting De La Hoya's carefully laid career plans.

Oddsmakers aren't so certain, making De La Hoya a 3 1/2-1 favorite in the fight, which will be televised by pay-per-view beginning about 11:30 p.m. EST from the Thomas and Mack Center.

"I think this is the first real test in my boxing career," De La Hoya said.

"He is a former world champion. He is unbeaten. I took this fight because I know that style wise Ike Quartey — heavy bitter, dangerous puncher — will bring out the best in me. I'm up for this fight." For Quartey, it's not only the chance to finally earn some big money — he'll get about \$3 million — but the chance to vault his name into boxing's top tier of fighters.

Quartey was supposed to fight Pernell Whitaker last April in a bout that fell through when Whitaker tested positive for cocaine. Then promotional problems derailed a possible fight with IBF welterweight champion Felix Trinidad.

"It's the biggest opportunity of my life," Quartey said.

Should De La Hoya win, he won't have to look far for his next opponent. Former three-time champion Frankie Randall and Oba Carr are fighting a 10-round elimination fight on the undercard for the right to challenge De La Hoya on May 22 in Las Vegas.

De La Hoya is rooting for Randall, a 37-year-old former WBA super lightweight champion. Carr is 27.

"Oba Carr wouldn't motivate me as much as Randall would," De La Hoya said. "Frankie is still hungry. He has a name. He'd help me fill up an arena." Spoken just like a promoter.

Spurs overcome 46 by Iverson to beat 76ers

PHILADELPHIA (R) — Allen Iverson scored 46 points for Philadelphia but Malik Rose made up for poor performances by David Robinson and Tim Duncan to lead the San Antonio Spurs to a 98-94 victory over the 76ers on Friday.

Rose, who attended Drexel, minutes away from the First Union Centre, scored a career-high 22 points on 10-of-12 shooting and grabbed nine rebounds as the Spurs (3-3) snapped a three-game losing streak.

"My teammates were getting me the ball," said Rose, who bought 64 tickets for family and friends. "We played well, we shared the ball and I was the recipient of some good passes and a little luck."

Iverson nearly equalled his total during the 76ers' 3-0 start. He had been a dismal 15-of-55 (27 percent) from the field and averaged 16.7 points as Philadelphia got off to a 3-0 start, its best since the 1984-85 campaign.

But it was a different Iverson in this contest as he dominated on the off-

sive end and came within four points of a career high, hitting 14-of-26 from the floor and 15-of-17 from the foul line.

"It would have been better to have a one-point performance and win than having a 40-point game and lose," said Iverson, who added seven rebounds and six assists.

Rose, whose previous career best was 14 points, was the surprising hero as Robinson and Duncan battled foul trouble.

Robinson, who picked up his fifth foul early in the third quarter, was 3-of-8 from the field and just 9-of-18 from the foul line to finish with 15 points and eight rebounds. Duncan fouled out with 1:59 to play with 15 points and six boards.

"We can't keep putting this kind of pressure on the supporting cast," Robinson said. "We've played some good ball, it's just that we've turned the ball over at times and have not shot as well as we would have liked. It took a total team effort to scrap this one

out."

Avery Johnson scored 15 points and Sean Elliott chipped in 13 for the Spurs, who shot an atrocious 28-of-51 from the foul line. They were outrebounded 46-42 but owned a 52-24 advantage in points in the paint.

In Denver, Nick Van Exel had 26 points and six assists and Chauncey Billups made four free throws in the final 16 seconds to preserve the Nuggets' first victory of the year, a 100-94 triumph over the Dallas Mavericks.

Only five games into the schedule, the Nuggets already are ahead of last season's pace, Denver, which lost its first four games this year by an average of 12 points, started the 1997-98 season with 12 straight losses en route to a franchise-worst 11-71 record, the second-worst mark in NBA history.

The victory was the first for Nuggets coach Mike D'Antoni, who served as the team's director of player personnel during the nightmarish 1997-98 campaign.

The Nuggets nearly blew a 16-point fourth-quarter lead but were able to hang on after Dallas rallied within 97-94 with 12 seconds left.

Michael Finley scored 28 points for the Mavericks (1-4).

In Oakland, Karl Malone, who averaged 31 points against the Warriors last season, scored 35 points and grabbed 12 rebounds to lead the unbeaten Utah Jazz to a 97-81 win over winless Golden State.

Utah's 5-0 start is the best in franchise history. The Jazz also posted their ninth straight win over the Warriors and fifth in a row on Golden State's homecourt.

This was Utah's first game against the Warriors since Malone torched them for 56 points, including the game-winning basket in the closing seconds, on April 7.

Terry Cummings and Tony Delk scored 16 points apiece but the Warriors fell to 0-5, four losses short of last year's dismal start.

Sponsors to IOC: Clean up this scandal fast

NEW YORK (AP) — A revolt is taking shape among the Olympics' biggest corporate sponsors, who fear their investment is losing value because of the burgeoning bribery scandal.

At a closed-door meeting Thursday with the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the big-money sponsors assailed the IOC for its handling of the Salt Lake City scandal and demanded thorough reform, participants said.

"We told them, 'Fix it, fix it fast and don't surprise us,'" one participant said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The 3 1/2-hour meeting was described as civil but blunt, offering the clearest sign yet the IOC is facing a revolt by the corporations that pay some \$50 million each to the five-ring Olympic logo in their ads.

The meeting involved 10 of the 11 companies in the Olympic Program, the IOC's highest-level sponsorship

group: Sports Illustrated, McDonald's, John Hancock, Samsung, Coca-Cola, IBM, Visa, United Parcel Service, Xerox and Eastern Kodak. Panasonic was not represented.

The worst scandal in the modern Olympics' 105-year history involves allegations Salt Lake City gave IOC members money, gifts, scholarships and other favors to land the 2002 Winter Games. The IOC selects the Olympic host cities.

Sponsor representatives, all speaking on condition of anonymity, said the companies are worried the Olympic rings will lose their "halo effect" and become devalued as advertising tools if the scandal persists.

The IOC said it had received the sponsors' support at Thursday's meeting.

The meeting, with IOC vice president Dick Pound and marketing director Michael Payne, involved two dozen vice presidents, marketing

chiefs and public relations directors, who said their concerns reflect worries higher up.

"We told them chairmen and bosses were now telling us that they were worried the IOC was not committed to reforms," one participant said.

All the representatives interviewed said the sponsors discussed four things:

— change in IOC management "at the highest level."

— "thorough reform" through the expulsion of any member directly linked to the scandal; so far, nine members have been expelled or resigned.

— permanent changes in voting for Olympic host cities.

— more public accountability, including open financial records.

Unless the IOC adopts such reforms at a special assembly March 17-18, "it faces revolt March 19," one representative who attended the meeting said.

Payne said he did not see a

significant change in attitude at Thursday's meeting, the second of its kind since mid-January.

"Everyone was very concerned, but they have been concerned."

It was not a contentious meeting," he said. "They asked some questions of us — 'How serious is the IOC on the reform process?' We told them, 'Very serious.'"

Payne said some of the sponsors might be feeling pressure as they near the deadline for locking in ad budgets leading to the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

For the first time this week, a major sponsor publicly criticized the IOC. John Hancock insurance broke off negotiations with NBC on dirs 20 million in Olympic ads. The company said the move is designed to pressure the IOC to make significant changes.

David D'Alessandro, John Hancock's president, said he was trying to save the Olympics' good name rather

than attempting to force price reductions.

In other developments Friday:

The highest-ranking Olympic official implicated in the bribery case urged the IOC to dismiss the "scandalous allegations" against him and his son.

Kim Young of South Korea said "rumor-mongering" has been a "personal affront" to his "untarnished reputation."

In a three-page letter to IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch, Kim said he will fight his case vigorously. He has been considered a leading candidate to succeed Samaranch, whose term expires in 2001.

— IOC member Jacques Rogge of Belgium, who heads the oversight panel for the 2000 Olympics, said preparations for those games are

being disturbed because the Utah scandal has raised questions about whether Sydney won the bid fairly.

Brazilian star is fit and ready for comeback

MILAN, Italy (AP) — Brazilian superstar Ronaldo, long troubled by knee tendinitis, may be back to action next week after French doctors declared him fit to play, Internazionale officials said Saturday.

The 22-year-old Brazilian striker would be fielded for a portion of Wednesday's Italian Cup first-leg semifinal against Parma.

Inter's coach Mircea Lucescu said he hoped to have the star forward in his best form for the March 3 Champions League quarter-final match against Manchester United.

Ronaldo, who has been suffering from inflamed tendons in both knees since the 1998 World Cup in France, has been repeatedly sidelined this season and has played his last Serie A match with Inter on Jan. 17.

However, Italy's largest sports daily Gazzetta dello Sport reported Saturday that

Ronaldo was cautious about his comeback as he still feels some pain in his left knee.

Ronaldo said in a recent interview that he made a mistake by trying to return to action too soon last year, aggravating his knee problems.

The club said that Ronaldo underwent successful knee examinations by a team of French professors in Paris three days ago.

The Milan club, badly missing Ronaldo's goals although fielding such stars as Roberto Baggio, Ivan Zamorano and Diego Simeone, is currently fifth in the Serie A standings, eight points behind leader Fiorentina.

Ronaldo was a key to Inter's triumph in the UEFA Cup and to second place in the Italian league last season.

This season Ronaldo has played only 8 full matches of Inter's 34 league and Cup games, scoring 7 goals — three on penalties.



Ronaldo (File photo)

Four-time all-star Price retires after 12-year career

ATLANTA (AP) — Mark Price could have played another season, but he was frustrated by the injuries, weary of all the moving around and anxious to get on with the rest of his life.

So, one of the greatest shooters in NBA history announced his retirement Friday, ending a 12-year career that included four All-Star games, a spot on Dream Team II and some memorable battles with Michael Jordan.

"It is time," Price said during a news conference at Alexander Memorial Coliseum, where he starred for Georgia Tech in the 1980s. "My wife and I are expecting our fourth child in two weeks, there has been a lot of wear and tear and we have made four moves in the last four years." Price, who will turn 35 on Monday, had offers from several teams to return for another season. But he was leaning toward retirement after being waived in June by the

Orlando Magic, and the lockout clinched his decision.

"You have to know when to say when, and now is the perfect time," Price said. "It makes me feel good to step down when it's my choice and not because nobody wants me." Only 6-foot (1.83 meters) and 180 pounds (81.65 kilos), Price was hardly an imposing presence on the court. But his uncanny shooting touch earned him a spot in the NBA, and he became a star by boning his passing skills.

He has the highest career free-throw percentage in NBA history (.904) and shot better than 40 percent from 3-point range. He finished with career averages of 15.2 points and 6.7 assists per game.

Price spent his first nine seasons with the Cleveland Cavaliers, making the All-Star game in 1989 and 1992-94. He was a member of Dream Team II, which won the world championship in 1994.

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jotimes@go.com.jo

Iraq says three killed in U.S. attack

BAGHDAD (AP) — Iraq said U.S. planes attacked sites in the southern "no fly" zone Saturday, killing at least three civilians and injuring several others.

A government statement quoted a military spokesman as the American planes conducted 34 sorties over the provinces of Basra, Maisan, Dhiqar and Najaf in an operation lasting 1 1/2 hours.

One formation "attacked a civilian installation ... and this aggression caused the martyrdom of three civilians and wounding of a number of others."

Iraq said the jets attacked a residential area in the southern

city of Al Faw, Basra province, injuring several people including women, and a fisherman's boy.

The report could not be independently verified.

In the United States, the U.S. Central Command in Florida said American planes attacked Iraqi air defense sites near Talil, about 270 kilometers southeast of Baghdad, and on the Al Faw peninsula.

The U.S. aircraft returned to their bases safely and damage assessment is ongoing, the Central Command statement said.

"Despite repeated warnings, Iraqi actions and intentions pose serious threats to our

coalition forces and friends in the region. Our actions today are an appropriate response to these threats," the statement said.

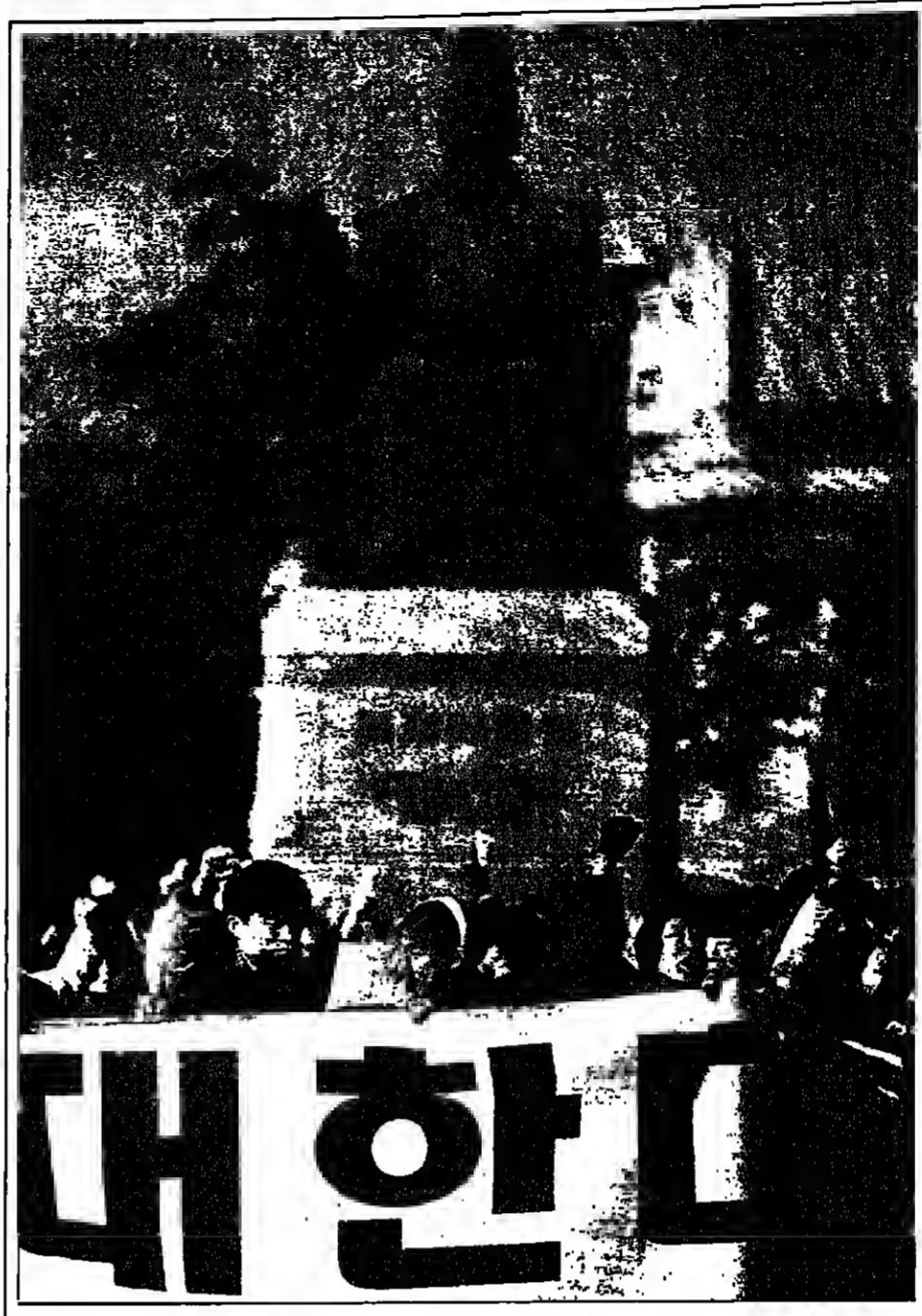
The planes came from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, the Iraqi statement said.

Iraqi air defenses fired at the planes over Dhiqar, the statement added.

Iraq does not recognize the "no-fly" zones and has vowed to fire at any plane that violates its air space.

Iraq said one civilian was killed on Friday and two were killed on Thursday in northern Iraq.

The Iraqi statement said that on Saturday the attacking



PROTEST AGAINST LANGUAGE DECISION: Nearly 50 South Korean linguists and activists stage a rally Saturday in front of a statue of King Sejong in Seoul opposing the government's decision to allow Chinese characters on street signs and in government documents. King Sejong of Korea's last Yi dynasty invented the Korean alphabet and promulgated it in 1443. Protesters said the use of Chinese characters will tarnish the Korean language. The banner reads, 'We oppose the use of Chinese characters!' (AP photo)

New Iraq disarmament panel completed

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The chairman of a key U.N. panel that is to review Iraqi disarmament unveiled Friday a 20-member board whose members combine political with technical expertise.

Brazilian Ambassador Celso Amorim, who is to chair three panels which are to review U.N. relations with Iraq in the light of the U.S. and British air strikes in December, unveiled the panels' composition to reporters Friday.

Initial favourable reactions from Security Council members to the disarmament panel indicated that he appeared to have pulled off a tricky balancing act and avoided criticism from both sides in the divided council.

"This is a balanced panel," Amorim said after submitting the final list to U.N. Security Council President Robert Fowler.

The team included "people

who can bring to this work adequate amount of expertise also an adequate amount of broad view of the problems in different areas."

But he acknowledged that he had no guarantee that Iraq would cooperate with the panelists, who include experts of the U.N. Special Commission and its American deputy, Charles Duvelier.

Baghdad has vowed that the UNSCOM inspectors, accused of being spies for the United States and Israel, will never return to Iraq, and is demanding the lifting of sanctions which are linked to the elimination of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.

As expected, UNSCOM chief Richard Butler will not be a panelist. Amorim confirmed that Butler had told him that "he didn't expect to be in the panel."

Russia has cut off official relations with the Australian

UNSCOM chairman and is demanding his dismissal after his negative report on Iraqi cooperation with the inspectors triggered the U.S. and British air strikes.

The disarmament panel notably includes representatives of the five U.N. Security Council permanent members — Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States — and their UNSCOM commissioners on the panel.

France is not sending its UNSCOM commissioner but a foreign ministry arms control expert, Daniel Parfait, and China is also sending government expert Liu Jieyi instead of its commissioner.

The disarmament panel is the most controversial of the three, which are also to cover the humanitarian situation and issues relating to the 1990 invasion of Kuwait, because of strong political differences among the five permanent members on Iraq.

And U.N. chief Kofi Annan will be represented by his undersecretary general for disarmament, Jayantha Dhanapala, who is also one of the 22 UNSCOM commissioners. Three of the five council permanent members — Britain, Russia and the United States — will have their UNSCOM commissioners on the panel.

PROTEST AGAINST LANGUAGE DECISION: Nearly 50 South Korean linguists and activists stage a rally Saturday in front of a statue of King Sejong in Seoul opposing the government's decision to allow Chinese characters on street signs and in government documents. King Sejong of Korea's last Yi dynasty invented the Korean alphabet and promulgated it in 1443. Protesters said the use of Chinese characters will tarnish the Korean language. The banner reads, 'We oppose the use of Chinese characters!' (AP photo)

NEWS IN BRIEF

German bank official murdered in Iran

TEHRAN (AP) — A German official with the Deutsche Bank in Tehran was shot dead Saturday by a gunman who was later killed by police, the official news agency IRNA reported. Citing an "informed" police source, the agency said the gunman, who was being pursued by police, stopped a car belonging to the German embassy along a motorway south of Tehran. It said he took the German driver hostage and tried to flee. The gunman then killed the man, whom the agency named as Heinrich Lembert Heimes, the Deutsche Bank's Tehran representative. IRNA had reported earlier that a man, "apparently a German national," had been murdered along the Kashan-Qom highway south of Tehran. Police caught up with the gunman, and he was killed in a shoot-out along with one policeman, the agency said.

At least 67 dead in Afghan quake

ANDER (AP) — The death toll from an earthquake which struck eastern Afghanistan two days ago continued to climb Saturday as rescue efforts get underway in isolated districts outside of Kabul. The official Balkh news agency said it had confirmed 57 dead and another 10 children froze to death as they were too scared to go back to their homes following the quake. Authorities said 27 children were missing while at least 210 people were injured and the number left homeless exceeded 1,000, according to combined reports in Ander, near the earthquake's epicentre about 70 kilometers west of Kabul. Wardak provincial governor, Malaway Shamsuddin, told AFP that 300 people from two villages were homeless. "Nine villages were severely affected in the region but we still don't have accurate figures," he said.

Eritrea denies claim of 7,000 casualties

ASMARA (AP) — Eritrea on Saturday denied Ethiopian claims that 7,000 Eritrean soldiers have been killed or wounded in the Horn of Africa war, calling the casualty figures "a pack of lies." The Eritrean News Agency quoted government spokesman Yemane Gebremeskel as saying the figures were greatly inflated and that Ethiopia had not captured key Eritrean military posts as it had asserted. "This is simply a pack of lies," Yemane said. "This deceptive strategy is very dangerous and very naive. They should not assume their people do not know the truth. The casualty figures announced late Friday by Ethiopia, which also claimed to have destroyed six Eritrean tanks and several ammunition depots, could not be independently confirmed."

Countries to enter NATO next month

BUDAPEST (AP) — The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland are to join NATO on March 12, Hungary's MTI news agency quoted the U.S. embassy here as saying on Saturday. The ceremony is to be held at the Harry Truman Library in Independence, Missouri, the report indicated. NATO was founded during Truman's presidency. MTI quoted the U.S. ambassador in Budapest, Peter Tufo, as paying tribute to the Hungarian people who struggled to put their Communist heritage behind them and to play a leading role in central Europe. The report confirmed a statement Thursday by the Polish foreign ministry spokesman that Poland would join the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation on March 12.

Revolutionary Guards say fatwa stands

TEHRAN (AP) — The death sentence issued against British writer Salman Rushdie by the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini is irrevocable, Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards force said in a statement Saturday. The statement, carried by the IRNA news agency, said Khomeini's verdict was "based on Islam" and could not be retracted. "The apostate Salman Rushdie will eventually be burnt in the fire of Muslims' wrath," the elite force said. The statement blasted "certain Western countries and false advocates of freedom of thought and human rights" for a two-year "disinformation campaign to make world people and Muslims believe that Iran has backed down from its stances towards the apostate author Salman Rushdie."

Iranian opposition denounces candidate ban for municipal polls

TEHRAN (AP) — The growing row over Iran's first-ever municipal elections escalated Saturday as opposition leaders demanded the banning of their candidates by hardliners on a selection committee.

"It's a kind of inquisition and we condemn it. President [Mohammad] Khatami should intervene," said Ibrahim Yazdi, head of the banned but tolerated Freedom Movement of Iran (FMI), a leading opposition group.

Khatami should "respect his electoral commitments and support a true people's participation in power," he said.

Yazdi denounced the "pre-selection" of candidates and their "arbitrary elimination for ideological reasons."

"The municipal elections are a vitally important test for the nation as well as a test of the sincerity of the

regime's leaders," he told reporters.

But he added that the Independent and Nationalist Front (INF), an umbrella opposition grouping that includes the FMI, would not call for a boycott of the Feb. 26 polls and urged eligible voters to take part.

"We will participate actively even if they reject our candidates," he told reporters at a press conference ahead of Monday's publication of a final list of approved candidates.

The landmark vote is considered the Islamic regime's first great test in local democracy, but it has provoked tension between conservatives and reformers as both sides seek to consolidate their local power base ahead of next year's parliamentary elections.

The disqualification of moderate and left-wing candidates has sparked a war of

words between Khatami supporters and his conservative opponents.

Khatami established an arbitration committee to quell the dispute, but local press reports say the end result has been only that his reformist supporters have been approved as candidates while other opposition candidates have been banned.

Newspapers have said banned candidates must offer a written pledge of allegiance to the constitutional principle that the nation is ultimately guided by its supreme spiritual leader, currently hardliner Ayatollah Ali Khatami.

Moderates are concerned that vetting candidates will dampen public enthusiasm and lead to a low turnout, particularly among the country's 30 million or so youngsters who played a decisive role in bringing Khatami to office in 1997.

About 330,000 candidates, including 5,000 women, have been approved so far to stand in elections for 200,000 council seats.

Vigilantes linked to killers of Iranian dissidents — official

TEHRAN (AP) — Hardline vigilantes who assaulted the brother of Iran's supreme leader are linked to the group behind the recent killings of dissidents, a presidential aide said in remarks published Saturday.

About 100 hooligans attacked Hadi Khamenei, younger brother of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and a press adviser to President Mohammad Khatami, as he prepared to address a gathering in the holy city of Qom on Thursday evening.

Khamenei was taken to hospital with "serious injuries," several Tehran newspapers reported Saturday. Earlier reports that he had suffered a fractured skull have not been confirmed.

Newspapers said the attackers also broke the windows of the Mohammadieh Mosque and tore down posters of Khatami.

The office of the Qom governor condemned the attack.

Khamenei, 51, owns the liberal-leftist newspaper, World of Islam and his political views are moderate, in contrast to those of his elder brother, who is a leading hardliner in the Iranian hierarchy.

President aide Ali-Akbar Mohateshemi said the attack on Hadi Khamenei and the dissident murders were linked.

"Our free-minded people should not sit idle and allow such actions by the intelligence ministry to continue," Mohateshemi told the World of Islam newspaper.

"No doubt, those who attacked Hojatoleslam Hadi Khamenei... were the same group and are linked to them," Mohateshemi said.

Vigilantes were trying to replace the climate of "freedom and independence" with violence and dictatorship, he said.

Iraq mourns victims of its worst Gulf War tragedy

BAGHDAD (AP) — In the dark cavernous hall of the former bomb shelter, a beam of light steals through a ragged hole in the roof. Some more light is spread by candles burning before rows of framed photographs of children on from U.S. warplanes killing civilians.

The hole was blasted by a U.S. missile; the pictures are of those killed in the attack on the crowded shelter eight years ago in the worst civilian tragedy of the 1991 Gulf War.

On Saturday, hundreds of people visited the Al-Amriya shelter on the anniversary of the attack to pay homage to the 403 people that Iraq says were killed in the missile strike. The victims included 52 children and 261 women.

Unmindful of the crowd around her, a woman in black Islamic garb sobbed loudly as she wiped a picture of her daughter, Shayama Ali Hussein, a teenager with a shock of black hair strewn on her forehead, posing for the camera in her finery.

Reserved in his grief, Shayama's father, Ali Hussein Saleh, wept with no sound, gazing at pictures of his three other children who also were killed in the attack.

Also Saturday, the country started a week of mourning for its dead in the Gulf War. Artillery fired 21-gun salutes and senior officials laid wreaths on the Martyrs' Monument in Baghdad.

The government has preserved

the Al Amriya bomb shelter as a war memorial to keep alive not only the memory of the victims but also the hatred for the U.S. government.

Crayon drawings by children in the shelter showing bombs from U.S. warplanes killing civilians.

It was the missile that tore a hole as wide as a satellite dish antenna in the one and a half-metre thick ceiling. Ten minutes later, a second missile went through the hole and exploded inside.

Saleh said he had sent his four children to Amriya, a short walk from his house, for the first time on the night of Feb. 12 at 6 p.m. Just before dawn the next day, he said he was woken up by an explosion.

It was the missile that tore a hole as wide as a satellite dish antenna in the one and a half-metre thick ceiling. Ten minutes later, a second missile went through the hole and exploded inside.

Saleh said he rushed to the shelter but could not go inside.

"They brought my son to me. The others I could not even find the remains," he said.

Iraqi officials say temperature

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